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ALL WORK AND NO PLAY? LABOR, LITERATURE AND INDUSTRIAL MODERNITY ON THE WEIMAR LEFT

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ALL WORK AND NO PLAY? LABOR, LITERATURE AND INDUSTRIAL MODERNITY ON THE WEIMAR LEFT

by

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Dedication

To my friend George Costanza, who never works as hard as when applying for unemployment benefits ...

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ALL WORK AND NO PLAY? LABOR, LITERATURE AND INDUSTRIAL MODERNITY ON THE WEIMAR LEFT

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My dissertation, entitled "All Work and no Play? Labor, Literature and Industrial Modernity," analyzes writing about work that was mostly published in communist and anarchist newspapers during the Weimar Republic. Discussing texts that have been almost fully neglected, my approach departs from existing scholarship on Weimar in two significant ways: First, I analyze these texts in the context of the period's dominant theories, practices, psychologies, and utopian ideas concerning labor. Due to the proximity of artistic and industrial 'production' particularly in the minds and practices of Weimar communists, I consider these literary treatments of work also within the framework of literary and artistic meta-discourses during the Weimar Republic (e.g. Expressionism, New Objectivity, and Productivism).

Second, investigating such controversial issues as industrialization, the division of labor, technology, progress, etc., my dissertation leads to a transnational (hi)story in

which Weimar Germany can be viewed in the larger context of American imports such as Taylorism and Fordism, their Soviet variants, and pre-industrial counter-models.

Chapters One and Two scrutinize communist discourse on work, with Chapter One focusing on the situation in Germany (especially the rationalization drive sweeping the Weimar Republic after 1924 and its literary representations in the communist newspaper *Die rote Fahne*) and Chapter Two discussing the complex cross-fertilization between German and Soviet communist politics and culture (Egon Erwin Kisch, Sergei Tretiakov, et al.). In these two chapters, I put forth a critique of dominant Marxism-Leninism at the time. Its fetishization of labor and modernization can be found in the texts I discuss (although in highly contradictory terms), and was at the core of the worker-authors' self-understanding as "engineers" of socialism.

Chapters Three and Four present the challenge to communism's labor theories and artistic models that arises from various anarchist and syndicalist factions at the time – groups I summarily call 'anti-authoritarian socialism.' Proposing a veritable exodus from industrial modernity in texts published in Fritz Kater's *Der Syndikalist* and Franz Pfemfert's *Die Aktion*, anti-authoritarian socialists ventured to mostly pre-industrial settings both within Germany (e.g. in the case of Heinrich Vogeler's *Barkenhoff* commune) and Mexico (in this case, through the work of B. Traven).

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Introduction

In a comic report from July 1925 with the sarcastic title "Prosit Dawes-Kette" (Here's to the Dawes-Chain, published in the German communist daily *Die rote Fahne*), an author using the pseudonym "Gamma" describes the presentation of a conveyor belt at a technology fair. Gamma calls it "Dawes-Kette" after the United States' Dawes plan that was started in 1924 in order to help the German economy back on its feet after the defeat in World War I and to deal specifically with the hyperinflation that had shaken Germany in 1923. The author, however, appears to reject this economic plan as a way to establish American hegemony in Europe, export its production technology, and ward off socialism – a position validated by historian Charles S. Maier.[1] The report features a fair exhibitor who realizes that the public's opinion is turning against the machine in favor of the sweating workers who operate at it. In order to calm down the crowd, he serves the workers beer by letting bottles circulate on the conveyor along with the machine parts. The author unmasks this seemingly benevolent gesture as a publicity stunt, focusing instead on the high speed of the conveyor and the monotony of work it entails. The report ends, however, with a reversal of perspective characteristic of communist discourse on technology, with workers' control over the conveyor on the horizon: "Sticks and carrots … says the young worker and spits out. 'When we will control the machines it will be

[1] He states: "Reawakened U.S. participation in European affairs through the Dawes plan und subsequent loans were to transform the internal politics of Germany, the relations between France and Germany, and ultimately the whole economic position of the continent. United States funds would help purchase German industry's cooperation with the Weimar regime, thus enabling new coalitions to form governments without Socialist participation as the balance of power in Berlin shifted to a more conservative basis." (Maier, 1975, p. 481)

like that [i.e., beer circulating on the conveyor] ... but for now it's still the Dawes-Chain.'"[2] (DrF, July 3, 1925)

Texts such as Gamma's, who was most likely a so-called worker-correspondent (*Arbeiterkorrespondent*) rather than a professional author, have hardly ever been considered in the vast field that is Weimar Studies, let alone in the literary history of the period. If this study is interested in such written documents of low literary stature, it is not simply out of fascination with their very obscurity. Rather, I propose to turn to such texts in an effort to understand better the complex responses to modernity and modernization on Weimar Germany's far left, i.e., orthodox communism and what I will call 'anti-authoritarian socialism.' Since I view it as crucial to analyze the literary forms in which those responses were articulated, it will be imperative to consider the intricate connection between larger social processes and the transformations in the realm of literature in the 1920s and early 1930s.

Gamma's text serves as an apt point of entry to this investigation. It crystallizes the Weimar left's contradictory impulses of technological dystopia and utopia in the iconic image of the conveyor belt which served as a kind of *pars pro toto* for modernity and modernization at large at the time (along with cinemas, fashion magazines, department stores, radios, etc.). It also points us in the direction of new concepts of what was then considered "literature." "Prosit Dawes-Kette" needs to be understood not only as an ambivalent critique of the conveyor belt, but also as a challenge to "Literature" authored by members of the bourgeoisie who had almost certainly never worked in a factory themselves and who found such matters unworthy of representation.

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[2] "'Zuckerbrot zur Peitsche', …meint der junge Arbeiter und spuckt aus. 'Wenn wir die Maschine kommandieren, wirds so…jetzt aber bleibts die Daweskette." Unless noted otherwise, all translations are by me [M.K.].

With Eric D. Weitz, one could say that it was only during the Weimar years when full-fledged modernity arrived in Germany. In his 2007 book *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*, he states that

> [t]he center of gravity had shifted to the city with its cacophony of sounds and images, to the factories and mines pounding out the products of an advanced industrial economy, and to the tensions and excitements of "mass society." This was a world in which most individuals worked for a wage or salary; people patronized the icons of a commercial economy and culture by reading newspapers, shopping in department stores, listening to prizefights on the radio, and going to the movies at least once a week; and politics included mass mobilizations to get out the vote, march on the city hall or the nearby factory, and, sometimes, take up arms in revolution and rebellion. (Weitz, 2007, p. 4)

In the 1920s, roughly half of the German population belonged to the industrial proletariat, and one third of the workforce was employed in the growing service sector. The agricultural sector, by contrast, had declined dramatically. (Wehler, p. 310-311) The defeat in World War I and the fall of imperial Germany, the advent of parliamentary democracy (along with women's suffrage), rapid urbanization, the rise of consumer culture, achievements in the realm of technology (whether in industry, warfare, information, or entertainment) – the dramatic transformations of German society evoked a plethora of competing responses. They ranged from outright opposition to euphoric celebration, sometimes combining both into one hybrid position, as Jeffrey Herf has demonstrated for the right (a position he calls 'reactionary modernism', for which Ernst Jünger's *Der Arbeiter* [The Worker] of 1932 is probably the best example).

In this study, I am interested in the Weimar left's literary responses to industrial modernity, which – at least that was the prevailing perception – had only now arrived in Germany full-blown. As we can see in Gamma's text, the left perceived the woes of this new regime as coming from the United States, the land of unfettered capitalism. At the

same time, however, the Soviet Union – for many German leftists the land of the future – was attempting to "catch up" with the West by importing production technology and methods from the very same United States for the sake of raising productivity. As we will see, this configuration posed something of a predicament for German communists and their views on labor, technology, progress, development, etc. A competing segment of the Weimar left – those derided by orthodox Marxists as immature 'spontaneists' – shunned industrial modernity altogether in search of an allegedly lost pre-industrial community.

The contrast between embrace of, and escape from, industrial modernity on the Weimar left took place amidst the competing impulses of Americanism, Bolshevism, and an Anarcho-Syndicalism that drew inspiration mainly from Mexico. This triangulation of the Weimar left's imagination between West, East, and South is essential even though (or: precisely because) America, the Soviet Union, and Mexico served German writers more as a projection screen for their desires and anxieties than as places on their own terms. I will therefore devote one chapter to the infatuation of German communists with the industrialization of the Soviet Union, and another to the anti-authoritarian celebration of the indigenous people of Mexico.

As an example of this anti-authoritarian position, compare the following text by an unknown author to the one by Gamma cited above. It was published in the weekly newspaper *Der Syndikalist* 18/1921, is entitled "Arbeit?" (Work?), and already the title's question mark signals its antagonism to prevailing notions of labor. The text states:

> The question is: is work natural? As we speak, there are still peoples in existence who lie in the sand without performing 'work', who smoke, play tunes on pipes, swim, hunt, fish, garden, gorge themselves, copulate – i.e. live playfully without the preoccupation with progress – it therefore seems rather clear that only in

> Europe, where so many people share so little space, the majority is forced to work on behalf of the non-working minority.[3]

Texts such as this one constitute a discourse on work *ex negativo*. Anti-authoritarian socialists were highly skeptical of the hierarchies created by the machinization and scientification of labor, and their own eclectic thinking and writing on the matter is often marked by the very absence of considerations of modern industrial labor. Instead, they conjured up pre-modern, pre-industrial modes of working and living, evacuating the battlegrounds of Weimar modernity and withdrawing to allegedly more originary communal forms, which they occasionally tried to enact in small utopian agricultural communes. Consequently, they articulated their views in often archaic literary forms that had little in common with the fashions of the Weimar Republic. This position, as we will see in Chapters Three and Four, was just as fraught with contradictions as the communist one. I will, however, also point out that this position – in the context of today's very different world of work – has made a comeback in recent attempts to think beyond wage-based society.

The texts under consideration for this study all address issues of labor, whether they are pieces written by anonymous contributors (like the author of "Arbeit?") or by people writing under pseudonym (like Gamma), well-known texts (e.g. by Egon Erwin Kisch and B. Traven), essays on cultural and literary theory (e.g. by Walter Benjamin and

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[3] "Fragestellung: Ist Arbeit selbstverständlich? Da es heute noch Völkerschaften gibt, die ohne Arbeitsleistung im Sande liegen, rauchen, auf Rohrflöten blasen, schwimmen, jagen, fischen, gärtnern, fressen, koitieren, also spielerisch und ohne den berüchtigten Fortschrittswahn leben, wird deutlich, daß lediglich die Zusammenballung vieler Menschen auf verhältnismäßig kleinem Raum (Europa) zur zwangsweisen Betätigung der Mehrheit zugunsten der faulenzenden Minderheit zwingt."

Georg Lukács), or theoretical and sociological writings on labor. Moving rather freely across these different genres, my study aims precisely at bridging the gap between literary and social history, at situating the literature about labor in the context of the larger debates about labor and the right path to a new "proletarian literature" of the 1920s and early 1930s.

From its physiological and psychological to its political and cultural aspects, labor was for the first time systematically studied, resulting in such seminal studies as Siegfried Kracauer's *Die Angestellten* (The White-Collar Workers) of 1930 or Erich Fromm and Hilde Weiss' survey *Arbeiter und Angestellte am Vorabend des Dritten Reiches* (published in English as *The Working Class in Weimar Germany: A Psychological and Sociological Study*), conducted between 1929 and 1931. In fact, it has been pointed out that sociology itself owes its existence as a separate discipline to the newly emerging scientification of labor.[4] Some of the most enduring masterpieces of Weimar culture, such as Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1929) or Bertolt Brecht Kurt Weill's anti-opera *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1929), are testimonies to the centrality of labor for the culture as a whole. In literature, industrial novels (Grünberg, Reger, Ottwalt), dramas (Toller, Kaiser), and reportage (Kisch, Hauser, Lania) appeared on the scene, while the infatuation with the functionalism and efficiency of the "machine age" dominated in architecture (the Bauhaus), photography (Renger-Patzsch, Moholy-Nagy), and music (Hindemith). Criticizing the connection between developments in industrial

[4] Both Durkheim (*The Division of Labor in Society*, 1893) and Weber (*Zur Psychophysik der industriellen Arbeit*, 1908), who are often cited as the "fathers" of sociology, would have to be considered in this regard. For an example of the argument alluded to above, see George Steinmetz, "Scientific Authority and the Transition to Post-Fordism: The Plausibility of Positivism in U.S. Sociology since 1945." *The American Historical Review* (Vol. 110, No 5, December 2005).

production and the arts, film critic Béla Balázs called the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) "die Ästhetik des laufenden Bandes" (the aesthetics of the conveyor belt).[5]

I need to make clear at the outset, then, that I am less concerned with the materiality of labor at the time than with the ways in which it was conceived and perceived. While I seek to ground the textualization of labor in its social context, my study is largely a discourse analysis of texts in their respective contexts. And while the texts I will consider are taken from different discursive arenas, they reveal commonalities in the ways in which the Weimar left thought, wrote, and dreamt about labor. Joseph Vogl, in a recent study of the correlations between poetic and economic thought, proposes a position that will serve as a foothold for this dissertation. He describes his project as follows:

> Throughout this study we will deal with the confrontation and connection of literary and political/economic texts. The goal is to relate their respective propositions to one another and to recognize an epistemological continuum between them.[6]

Vogl's approach recognizes that texts never simply passively "reflect" social realities, but that they instead actively "construct" it. He also maintains that, despite all their incongruity, literary and scientific discursive practices participate in one single epistemological continuum (*Wissenszusammenhang*) and ought to be studied together. In

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[5] He states in his *Der Geist des Films*: "Die Sachlichkeit ist auch eine allgemeine Parole der deutschen ästhetischen Kritik geworden, und darum muß einiges noch dazu gesagt werden. Vor allem, daß sie, in dieser Form, nichts weniger als eine sozialistische oder revolutionäre Parole ist, was man sich auf der linken Seite einzubilden scheint. Im Gegenteil. Diese Sachlichkeit ist als Bild der taylorisierten Welt aus der Weltanschauung des Trustkapitals entstanden. Sie ist die Ästhetik des laufenden Bandes. Sie ist die letzte Etappe jener 'Verdinglichung', die Karl Marx als den größten Fluch des bürgerlichen Kapitalismus beschreibt." (Balázs, p. 201)

[6] "Im Verlauf dieser Untersuchung wird es insbesondere um die Konfrontation und die Verknüpfung von literarischen und polit-ökonomischen Texten gehen, es wird darum gehen, die Aussagen der einen auf die Aussagen der anderen zu beziehen und darin einen gemeinsamen Wissenszusammenhang zu erkennen." (Vogl, p. 14)

Marxist thought, this is of course not a new idea, but has a long and contested career associated with the terms 'base' and 'superstructure'. I would, however, prefer Fredric Jameson's term 'transcoding' by which he means something similar to Vogl's epistemological continuum: the belief that social reality is indivisible, although not in the sense that economic realities "determine" the realm of ideas (at least not straight-forwardly so).[7] Instead, Jameson urges us to see the same codes at work across different structural levels of social reality – in our context, between the practices of labor and literature. If the connections and correlations within the social and epistemological continuum are not always immediately evident, it is because of the thorough job the division of labor has done, especially since the industrialization. However imperfect the outcome will be, I have tried to follow these important methodological interventions and make such connections visible.

I would argue – and I will return to this point in greater detail in the beginning of Chapter One – that this study is necessitated by the great strides scholarship has more recently made in looking at labor and its cultural implications during the Weimar Republic. This scholarship was not yet available to historians of Weimar working class literature who rediscovered the Weimar left the 1970s in the wake of the protest movement of the late sixties. In his *The Human Motor. Engergy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (1990), Anson Rabinbach explains how, since the 19th century in the wake of Helmholtzian thermodynamics, labor power became the central concept which could unify the productivity of nature, industry, and human activity. He pays special attention to the 1920s and 1930s during which, as he convincingly demonstrates, a veritable "science of work" began to emerge:

[7] See Jameson, 1981, p. 40.

> The efforts of European physiologists and liberal reformers to discover a scientific solution to the worker question in the objective laws of fatigue before the First World War foreshadowed the postwar politics of social modernity and social rationalization. The war hastened the acceptance of new ideas of industrial organization, including the many approaches developed by the science of work. Only after the war, however, did European governments, industrialists, and universities begin to recognize fully the potential benefits of these endeavors. During the interwar period a panoply of "social technologies" supported by European governments developed standardized forms of knowledge, became established professions, and became institutionalized as academic disciplines. (Rabinbach, p. 271)

This emerging "transcendental materialism" or "productivism," Rabinbach goes on to argue, was "politically promiscuous" as it was adopted by various ideologies: liberal, socialist, communist, and fascist. As Charles S. Maier points out in a seminal article on the social and political uses of Taylorism, the science of labor could be employed well in an attempt to foreclose social conflict by means of technology and technocracy and hence played an important role in "recasting bourgeois Europe" (the title of another book by Maier) through a "utopian change from power over men to the administration of things." (Maier, 1974, p. 32) This position was also taken by scholar and activist Karl-Heinz Roth in his seminal study *Die andere Arbeiterbewegung* of 1974.

Similarly, scholars like Mary Nolan and Walter Süss have demonstrated the efficacy of the Taylorist model for Germany and the Soviet Union respectively, testifying to the blurred boundaries in the alleged dichotomy between capitalism and Bolshevism with respect to labor. After all, what Maier calls the "administration of things" was a central tenet of Marxism-Leninism at the time (and beyond). Such scholarship provides us with the possibility to re-think the 20th century in a way that goes beyond the logic of the Cold War (within which many existing histories of the literature of the Weimar left had to remain). To quote Susan Buck-Morss:

> From the present side of this temporal divide, the cultural forms that existed in 'East' and 'West' (to use the Eurocentric terminology of the Cold War) appear uncannily similar. They may have differed violently in their way of dealing with the problems of modernity, but they shared a faith in the modernizing process developed by the West that for us today has been unalterably shaken. (Buck-Morss, p. x)

Borrowing a term from German sociologist Ulrich Beck, we could say that 'East' and 'West' shared in a grand *Ma(r)x-Weber-Modernisierungskonsens* (Beck, 1996, p. 37), i.e., a consensus about modernization among much of Marxist theory, socialism, and functional capitalism. Accounting for such blurred boundaries, I believe, is imperative for a reconsideration of the culture and literature of the Weimar left today.

How so? Writing about labor is usually a political statement in and of itself. From a proletarian perspective, the scandal of bourgeois art was precisely to have ignored this vital issue in favor of more sentimental subject matters. The split between labor and art, however, is still a fairly recent phenomenon. British Marxist Raymond Williams points us in the direction of the former inclusion of aesthetics in the work process, as well as its historical separation from it, through his etymological analysis of the terms 'industry' and 'art' in his book *Culture and Society*:

> Industry […] was a name for a particular human attribute, which could be paraphrased as 'skill, assiduity, perseverance, diligence'. This use of industry of course survives. But, in the last decades of the eighteenth century, industry came also to mean something else; it became a collective word for our manufacturing and productive institutions, and for their general activities. (Williams, p. xii)

In our context of the relationship between industrial and cultural production, it is striking that Williams traces a similar change of meaning for the word 'art' around the same time:

> From its original sense of a human attribute, a 'skill', it had come […] to be a kind of institution, a set body of activities of a certain kind. An art had formerly been any human skill; but Art, now, signified a particular group of skills, the 'imaginative' or 'creative' arts. (Williams, p. xiii)

Williams' intriguing analysis lays bare the separation of the technical and cultural spheres that became operative along with the introduction of waged labor and its division on the shop floor in the age of industrialization. (In the German context, we would have to trace the separation of *Handwerkskunst* or *Kunsthandwerk* into *Handwerk* and *Kunstwerk* and their respective meanings[8]). For Marxism, as a body of thought that like no other stresses the inter-dependence of base and superstructure – or, very much related to that: manual and intellectual labor – this divide, of course, always needed to be overcome.

During the Weimar years, this divide was subject to intense renegotiation. Across various artistic media, New Objectivity testified to a new convergence between art and everyday life. In literature, the novel, which proletarian thought considered as the prime genre of bourgeois inwardness, was in deep crisis. Among other factors, the socio-economic changes in the situation of writers and the technological advances in cultural production (photography, film, radio, mass publishing) amounted to a serious challenge to bourgeois notions of Literature and led to a reshuffling of the generic composition of the literary field. As Lukács' essays on realism in *Die Linkskurve* around 1930 prove, this was a highly political issue and could ultimately cost dissenting writers and artists their lives in the 1930s. Important for the purposes of this study is the rise of reportage, for this genre has traditionally been viewed as having a unique ability to deal with labor issues.

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[8] Herbert Marcuse, in his 1937 essay "Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur," theorized a parallel development of bourgeois 'abstraction' for the economic and the cultural spheres: to the same extent as the product loses its connection with the worker (and becomes a 'good'), he argued, the work of art loses the one with the materiality of its creation (and becomes an abstract 'value' – 'Werk' becomes 'Wert').

At the same time, influential thinkers on the left considered reportage, as a genre, a product of the very same social fragmentation it often grappled with thematically. While Lukács contrasted it unfavorably with the 19th century realist novel, Walter Benjamin showed sympathies for older, pre-industrial narrative forms which he subsumes under the category of "storytelling." Such literary debates will be an important part of this dissertation since they – as I hope to demonstrate – are intricately linked to issues of labor and its (re)presentation. Yet again, this study is not first and foremost a literary history, but more a history of writing about work and of how writing and working relate to one another. In other words, it deals with the relationship of 'work' and the 'Work,' to use Scott Cutler Shershow's distinction to which I will return later on.

Before presenting a brief outline of the structure of this study, I need to also say a few more words about the issue of labor itself. First of all, any study on the subject will face the difficulty that comes with the conceptual split into work and labor – a split that does not occur in German, where *Arbeit* carries the full load, and a split that few people can make sense of in the English-speaking world. For better or worse, I will follow Engels' terminology in which 'work' serves as the more generic term and 'labor' refers to work under capitalism. But this terminology is itself in need of historicization, and this study stems in large part from my desire to contribute to such a historicization of work/labor.[9] Since, as Harry Cleaver points out, this usage runs the risk of positing a "generic or transhistorical concept of work (or labor) that could be applied retrospectively throughout history and, by implication, projected forward into the future" (Cleaver[10]), I

[9] A recent anthology of labor theorists involved in historicizing work/labor is Ulrich Beck et al.: *Die Zukunft von Arbeit und Demokratie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2000).

[10] Cleaver writes: "I think it is true that prior to capitalism most societies had no generic concept of work. People were engaged in a wide variety of activities but it never occurred to anyone to refer to all these activities collectively as 'work'. Some people raised animals or tended crops, others made barrels or ships

shall have to qualify these terms whenever they run counter to this preliminary and rough distinction. Especially with the anti-authoritarian challenge to work/labor in modernity, we will see that these terms are always already reified categories which preclude alternative conceptions of 'productive behavior' and/or 'social interaction' to occur.

Alternative concepts and conceptions are hard to come by, but they exist and have always existed. In the second part of this study, we will see that anti-authoritarian socialist positions on labor start out with a rejection (and sometimes denial) of the social realities surrounding them. Therefore, I am using Paolo Virno's term 'exodus' as a key category for my discussion of anti-authoritarian socialist discourse and practice of work, a category by which he means

> a full-fledged model of action, capable of confronting the challenges of modern politics – in short, capable of confronting the great themes articulated by Hobbes, Rousseau, Lenin and Schmitt (I am thinking here of crucial couplings such as command/obedience, public/private, friend/enemy, consensus/violence, and so forth). (Virno, p. 196)

Exodus, which obviously refers back to the Jewish emancipation from slavery in Egypt, is used here in the sense of a strategy of "engaged withdrawal" from Western industrial modernity, from the labor it requires, and from the nation state that we can detect already during the Weimar years and that, as I shall argue in Chapter Three, has renewed relevance for debates on work in post-industrial society. My own approach to this topic, then, could be called "non-synchronic" vis-à-vis the historical material it approaches: it is informed by a Neo-Marxist critique of the "productivism" of Marxism-Leninism (e.g. in

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or silver dishes and so on. But they were referred to as shepherds or farmers, coopers or shipwrights or silversmiths rather than 'workers'. Different kinds of activities were just that and those who performed them were associated with particular castes, or subcultures or status groups. Members of exploited classes were often viewed as individuals representative of their social position, e.g. slaves or vassals or serfs, but again, not as 'workers'." (Cleaver, 1999)

the works of Marcuse, Baudrillard, Gorz, Virno, etc.) that this study will trace in the arenas of labor and literature. It is my hope that the reader – please allow me the pun – will find this non-synchronism productive.

Let us consider at the outset in what way the often confused attitudes toward work/labor on the Weimar left are already preconfigured on the level of Marxist theory. In *The Human Condition*, Hanna Arendt shows Marx's thought to be in basic agreement with political economy with respect to the centrality of labor for society.[11] The paradigm of the modern 'society of labor' (*Arbeitsgesellschaft*) would therefore not be challenged, but rather affirmed by Marx. Nevertheless, Marx also envisioned a society liberated not through, but from labor. Since this argument will be a constant theme throughout this study, it is worth quoting at length how Arendt sums up Marx' position:

> […] the fundamental contradiction which runs like a red thread through the whole of Marx' thought, and is present no less in the third volume of Capital than in the writings of the young Marx. Marx' attitude toward labor, and that is toward the very center of his thought, has never ceased to be equivocal. While it was an "eternal necessity imposed by nature" and the most human and productive of man's activities, the revolution, according to Marx, has not the task of emancipating the laboring classes but of emancipating man from labor; only when labor is abolished can the "realm of freedom" supplant the "realm of necessity." For "the realm of freedom begins only where labor determined through want and external utility ceases," where "the rule of immediate physical needs" ends. Such fundamental and flagrant contradictions rarely occur in second-rate writers; in the work of the great authors they lead into the very center of their work. In the case of Marx, whose loyalty and integrity in describing phenomena as they presented themselves to his view cannot be doubted, the important discrepancies in his

[11] Arendt distinguished clearly between work and labor. In her view, work is the constructive ability of the *homo faber*, whereas labor is a purely life-bound activity (the work of our hands versus the labor of our bodies). And while specialization can take place within the realm of work (the professions, guilds, etc.), the division of labor is something entirely different. This latter process, Arendt states, "is based on the fact that two men can put their labor power together and 'behave toward each other as though they were one.' This one-ness is the exact opposite of co-operation […] The industrial revolution has replaced all workmanship with labor." (Arendt, p. 123f) Ultimately, however, Arendt distinguishes both work and labor from 'action' as the realm in which the human condition is truly actualized.

> work, noted by all Marx scholars, can neither be blamed upon the difference "between the scientific point of view of the historian and the moral point of view of the prophet" nor on a dialectical movement which needs the negative, or evil, to produce the positive, or good. The fact remains that in all stages of his work he defined man as an animal laborans and then leads him into a society in which this greatest and most human power is no longer necessary. We are left with the rather distressing alternative between productive slavery and unproductive freedom. (Arendt, p. 104-105)

I do not fully agree with this Marx reading for reasons I will lay out later on, but it helps us understand a fundamental tension within the Marxist tradition at large, and has recently gained some traction among sociologists of work, who therefore often start out by quoting Lafargue's *The Right to Be Lazy* or Arendt rather than Marx.[12]

Having recognized this tension in Marx, we need to now look more closely into how Marx theorizes labor/work within the 'realm of necessity.' The key to this problem, I would argue, is the social division of labor, which is closely related to the central Marxian category of 'alienation.' In his earlier work, Marx is himself surprisingly close to contemporary articulations on this matter, such as André Gorz' 'multi-activity' or Ulrich Beck's *Bürgerarbeit*, both of whom argue – more or less radically - against the imposition of waged labor.[13] In their early work *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels write:

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[12] See for example the aforementioned anthology *Die Zukunft von Arbeit und Demokratie*, in which Ulrich Beck has assembled various theoreticians of labor. The aim of this volume is to move the contemporary discussion beyond the wage-based society. In a larger perspective, the 'autonomist' tradition within Marxism has always insisted on the abolishment of forced labor. See, for example, Harry Cleaver's essay "Industrialism or Capitalism? Conviviality or Self-Valorization? Some Notes on Ivan Illich's *Tools for Conviviality.*" (Cleaver 1987)

[13] See: André Gorz' *Arbeit zwischen Misere und Utopie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2000) [first published as *Misères du présent, richesses du possible* (1997)], and *Critique of Economic Reason* (London: Verso, 1989), as well as Ulrich Beck's essay "Die Seele der Demokratie: Bezahlte Bürgerarbeit" in *Die Zukunft von Arbeit und Demokratie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2000).

> For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in a communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic. (*The German Ideology*, p. 53)[14]

Here, Marx and Engels are closest to the abolishment of waged labor in favor of a combination of socially organized production of needs and activities aimed at self-realization/self-valorization.[15] This conception, however, lost its attractiveness once reformism had come to identify its ideas of progress with modern industrialism and its rigid division of labor. The goal was to take over the means of production, not to change them, as the young Soviet Union so well illustrates. As Thomas Meyer points out, it was not until the Weimar debate on rationalization during the second half of the 1920s that these ideas of industrial progress could even be questioned in communist discourse.[16]

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[14] Thomas Meyer also points out that this tension regarding work/labor in Marx' thinking remains unresolved till the end. He sees in Marx, however, a growing skepticism regarding large-scale production and the division of labor it entails. (Meyer, p. 174ff) We will return to this question later with respect to Marx' writings about Russia.

[15] A good definition of the term 'self-valorization' which originated in Italian 'Workerism' (*Operaismo*) is given by Harry Cleaver: "Self-valorization is the actual process of elaborating new ways of being that contradict and go beyond the way things are. Self-valorization is not just what we want, it is what really exists, it is made up of diverse moments of autonomous activity which, if not repressed or harnessed by capital, may go on developing, seizing more space and opportunity and elaborating concrete new worlds which will constitute a growing threat to the current system because of its growing power to displace and replace it." (Cleaver 1992)

[16] See Meyer, p. 180-183. Only the arguments between Marxists and Anarchists surrounding the First International had brought up the issue of industrial organization of labor, although the main bone of contention was the role of the state.

Social Democracy, in alliance with the labor unions (*Freie Gewerkschaften*), regarded rationalization as absolutely necessary. The "other" workers' movement (to take up Karl-Heinz Roth's term), i.e. the largely unskilled and often unemployed clientele of the communist party and the anti-authoritarian camp as opposed to the skilled and established one leaning toward social democracy[17], was the only one to clearly condemn rationalization within a capitalist economy. But the communists themselves were often prone to confuse the rational and just organization of socially necessary labor with the rationalization of the labor process itself, which was widely associated with the names of Fredrick Taylor and Henry Ford, as well as their German followers such as Fritz Giese (*Philosophie der Arbeit* [Philosophy of Work], 1932) and Emil Kraepelin. To what extent communists themselves were willing to use dialectics as a justification to go along with rationalization, can be seen in the following quote by Georg Lukács from his essay "History and Class Consciousness" of 1923:

> For the capitalist, this side of the process means an increase in the quantity of objects for him to deal with in his calculations and speculations. In so far as this process does acquire the semblance of a qualitative character, this goes no further than an aspiration towards the increased rationalization, mechanization, and quantification of the world confronting him […] For the proletariat, however, the 'same' process means its own emergence as a class. (Lukács, 1971, p. 171)

In such a conception of historical development, socialism is wedded to the industrial age, inasmuch as the proletariat owes its very existence to it. It would not come as a surprise,

[17] See Roth, especially pp. 81-88. Roth's theory of two workers' movements is very much alive and well today. Stating that "[T]he dominant stream of the Marxist tradition […] has always hated the poor, precisely for their being 'free as birds,' for being immune to the discipline of the factory and the discipline necessary for the construction of socialism," Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri are trying to find a new revolutionary subjectivity in the poor 'multitude' rather than in organized workers. (Hardt/Negri, 2000, p. 158)

then, if the proletariat and its intellectual and political leaders made a fetish out of industrial labor, all the way up to the suggestion that socialism was nothing other than one grand conveyor belt (Trotsky[18]). If there is one political agenda behind this study, it is to historicize and problematize this notion, along with the alternative "primitivist" model that anti-authoritarian socialism proposed.

The structure of this study will be as follows: I will investigate the competing models of work and literature as expressed in communist (Part One) and anti-authoritarian socialist (Part Two) culture, with each part being subsequently divided into two chapters. Chapter One will show the proximity of communist and capitalist models of industrial labor by looking at largely unknown, semi-fictional worker-correspondences about work in the feuilleton of the communist daily *Die rote Fahne*. This investigation aims to show that the communist understanding of work, ironically, despite its seeming opposition to its capitalist counterpart, reinforced the "laborization" which Hanna Arendt diagnosed for capitalist modernity. Moreover, it tended to liken even the literary practice – in which this understanding was being elaborated – to industrial production.

Chapter Two will make this connection even more explicit by looking at the way in which German communists who had traveled to the Soviet Union (e.g. Egon Erwin Kisch, Alexander Abusch, Anna Seghers, etc.) promulgated and reinforced the belief in the primacy of industrial labor and culture in Germany upon their return, including the productivist ethos of Soviet artists.

The structure of the second part of this dissertation, dealing with radical anarchist movements, which I subsume under the term 'anti-authoritarian socialism,' parallels the

[18] He writes in his *Problems of Everyday Life* of 1923: "The principle of socialist economy is harmony, that is, continuity based on inner concord. What is the conveyor? And endless moving belt that brings to the worker or takes from him everything required by the course of his work … it is necessary to separate Fordism from Ford and to socialize and purge it. This is what socialism does." (Trotsky, pp. 298-301).

first part (described above). Chapter Three will analyze again rather unknown, "low-style" literary treatments of work (usually published under pseudonym) in the anti-authoritarian socialist press (*Der Syndikalist*, *Die Aktion*, *Der Ziegelbrenner*). These texts differ from their communist counterparts not only in the alternative conception of the meaning of work for society and individuals, but also in that they elaborate a fundamentally different conception of 'class' which enables these authors, among other things, to challenge and even ridicule the productivist literary paradigm prevalent among communists. In other words: whereas communist authors converted themselves into workers, anarchist authors stressed the artistic value in non-alienated work.

Like Chapter Two, Chapter Four will look beyond German borders to see where the anti-authoritarian imagination found its alternative models (or fantasies) of work. Embracing 'backwardness' rather than the Soviet 'land of the industrial future', B. Traven's eminently successful novels not only took their readers to places where industrialization or the concept of waged labor seemed entirely foreign (e.g. Latin America); they also did so through a literary form that had little in common with the journalistic trend of the day, seeking instead a conception of narrative which, according to Walter Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller," existed before the industrial organization of labor forced the artisan, and hence the storyteller, into extinction.

To conclude this introduction, I would like to state clearly that I conceive of this study as a contribution to the politicization of German Studies. After years of dominance of postmodernism and its pretenses to live "after theory" (Terry Eagleton), central issues such as labor and its larger social and cultural implications are once again returning to prominence. In this sense, this study reveals as much, if not more, about the contemporary moment as it does about the Weimar years.

Chapter 1: Mediating Industry and Literature in *Industrieliteratur*: Weimar Communists on Labor and Rationalization

> Today's artist is in no position to freely choose his material; it is dictated by industrial life.
>
> (Lu Märten, "Kunst und historischer Materialismus," 1921)[19]
>
> The primary task of working-class art is the liquidation of the historical boundaries between artistic and general social technique.
>
> (Boris Arvatov, *Kunst und Produktion*, 1926)[20]

In 1927, the communist daily newspaper *Die rote Fahne* (The Red Flag) published a curious combination of two large photographs under the title "Jazz-Band und Fließ-Band" (Jazz band and Conveyor-belt, figure 1). The play on words - the German *Band* signifies both a musical band and the conveyor - seems confusing at first, as the upper photograph shows dancing women, whereas the page's lower part features a factory with men at an assembly-line. Where, then, does the parallelism, which the title's pun suggests, come from? The answer is provided in the captions: "Even dancing, which should be an expression of the joy of living, is put in the service of exploitation. Laundresses at a large-scale London laundry, who are made to dance during their lunch

[19] "Auch der heutige Künstler hat nicht die Macht, den ihm von der Industrie diktierten Inhalt zu bestimmen."

[20] The German publication of 1926 reads: "Die erste Aufgabe der Arbeiterklasse in der Kunst ist die Liquidierung der historisch bedingten Grenzen zwischen der künstlerischen und der allgemeinen sozialen Technik."

break in order to increase their working performance."[21] Aesthetics, the combination of the two images suggests, is drawn into the industrial work process for the same reason as the conveyor at the Detroit Ford factory in the other photograph, namely to increase production under capitalism.[22] And, at the time, the parallel even worked the other way around. When the writer-photographer Heinrich Hauser, still a communist sympathizer at that time[23], visited the Ford factory in 1932, he described the assembly-line workers' movements in aesthetic terms: as dance.[24]

As the above quotes by two cultural theorists indicate, the 1920s were a time in which the connection between aesthetic and industrial production was made very forcefully, and where the autonomy of art came under particularly heavy attack.[25] In her article "Kunst und historischer Materialismus" (Art and Historical Materialism), from

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[21] "Auch der Tanz, der ein Ausdruck der Lebensfreude sein sollte, wird in den Dienst der Ausbeutung gestellt. Wäscherinnen in einem Großbetrieb bei London, deren Arbeitsleistung durch ein Tänzchen in der Mittagspause gesteigert werden soll."

[22] Several other articles of that year (1927) in *Die rote Fahne* dealt with the relationship between music on one side, and rationalized labor and the conveyor belt on the other. See "Mechanische Musik. Rationalisierung in der Kunst – Zu wessen Nutzen?" (Mechanical Music. Rationalization in the Arts – In whose Service?, *DrF* , September 13, 1927) and "Rundfunkmusik und Fließband" (Radio Music and the Conveyor, *DrF*, July 14, 1927).

[23] Hauser would later participate in the fascist glorification of German labor, especially in his *Im Kraftfeld von Rüsselsheim* (In the Force Field of Rüsselsheim) of 1940. And even if it would require another dissertation, it is worth pointing out that Hauser, with his *Unser Schicksal die deutsche Industrie* (Our Fate – German Industry) of 1952, testifies also to the eerie contnuity of this discourse in the FRG.

[24] Hauser, *Feldwege nach Chicago* (1930), p. 29.

[25] In Germany, this synthesis was widely discussed across the political spectrum at the time and manifested itself in various positions in the debate over *Kultur* versus *Zivilisation*. Cultural conservatives such as Martin Heidegger also argued for the initial sameness of art and technology. Even though the following quote is taken from a later essay on technology, I am citing it here as a paradigmatic position taken already during the 1920s. He writes: "There was a time when it was not technology alone that bore the name technē. Once that revealing that brings forth truth into the splendor of radiant appearing also was called technē [...] The arts were not derived from the artistic. Art works were not enjoyed aesthetically. Art was not a sector of cultural activity." (Heidegger, p. 34)

which the quote is taken, German communist critic Lu Märten argues any distinction between 'art' and 'work' (in fact, she often uses the compound *Handwerkskunst*, craftsmanship) to be obsolete, since she regards work as the primary historical phenomenon from which emanates everything else. Similarly, Märten's Russian counterpart Boris Arvatov advances a productivist synthesis of art and specifically industrial labor (he brands non-industrial labor as "backward"). As stated in the introduction, this synthesis was to a large degree in sync with the changing social conditions for cultural workers during the Weimar years; at the same time, re-integrating art and labor after (what they perceived as) their separation by the bourgeoisie was part and parcel of the communist project. I have selected a German and Russian articulation of this position precisely because the efforts to establish a proletarian culture and literature in the Weimar Republic cannot be understood without at the same time considering similar debates in the young Soviet Union.

In this chapter, I will look at little-known communist worker-authors' (*Arbeiterkorrespondenten*) non- and semi-fictional writings about industrial labor and the ways in which they aided the establishment of this desired synthesis between labor and literature within an expanded notion of proletarian culture.[26] More concretely, I will focus on this literary issue within the larger context of debates about labor, its status and organization, and its real and perceived changes at the time – a context which found its clearest discursive expression in the complex debate about rationalization.

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[26] British Marxist Raymond Williams has convincingly shown that the narrow understanding of culture (i.e. canonized high art, Matthew Arnold's "best that has been thought and said in the world") has come into being only with the beginning industrialization (see his discussion in *Culture and Society*, p. xiii-xx). In order to broaden our conception of culture, Williams suggests using it in the sense of a "whole way of life." He writes: "But it would seem that from their emphasis on the interdependence of all elements of social reality, and from their analytic emphasis on movement and change, Marxists should logically use 'culture' in the sense of a whole way of life, a general social process." (Williams, 1995, p. 282)

In contrast to previous scholarship on this topic – i.e. mainly the rediscovery of Weimar's working-class literature and materialist aesthetics after 1968 by authors such as Gallas (1971), Gobron/Rothe (1972), Siegel (1973), Bürger (1974), Albrecht (1975), Witte (1976), Schütz (1977), Fähnders (1977), Kronberger (1979), and Geisler (1982)[27] – I propose two main conceptual changes: first, this chapter will broaden the scope of primary materials by discussing texts by anonymous workers, rather than focusing exclusively on well-known communist authors such as Egon Erwin Kisch, Johannes R. Becher, Willi Bredel, and Karl Grünberg. My main point of reference will be the communist daily newspaper *Die rote Fahne*, whose feuilleton featured, side by side, contributions by both renowned authors and worker correspondents.[28] *Die rote Fahne*, with its relatively large circulation of around 130.000 in 1932 and its dynamic interaction between contributors and readers, seems to offer much better basis for conclusions about popular attitudes – the 'structure of feeling'[29] – about work in communist discourse than works by individual(ist) authors.[30] Moreover, the focus on non- and semi-fiction, as David Spurr argues along similar lines, will allow us "to examine the discourse in a form unmediated by the consciously aesthetic requirements of imaginative literature." (Spurr, p. 2) While fictional and documentary discursive modalities are by no means opposed to

[27] Interestingly, scholarly interest in the literature of the Weimar left – just like the New German Cinema – died off rather abruptly around 1982 with the coming to power of the Kohl government and its proclamation of the *geistig-moralische Wende* (spiritual-moral turn).

[28] For a detailed history of the strategy of *Die rote Fahne*, see Brauneck (1973).

[29] Raymond Williams designates with this term a community's shared beliefs and practices which operate not only on a conscious, but also on an unconscious level. My choice of texts by unknown worker-authors aims at reaching below the "official" party doctrine – not least since Erich Fromm's sociological study of Weimar workers testifies to a striking discrepancy between political opinion and everyday life attitudes.

[30] I am not aware of any study that examines these texts about labor in *Die rote Fahne*.

one another, my choice of texts originates with the general tendency of worker-authors to steer away from fictional genres, which they believed to be of bourgeois origins.

Second, and conceptually even more important, I take issue with a rather curious tendency in the scholarship on communist industrial literature, namely the paradoxical lack of attention to labor history and theory. To clarify my point: certainly not all, but most of communist writing is set on the shop-floor and deals directly or indirectly with the work process. It was precisely its main purpose to bring the issue of labor, so conspicuously and scandalously absent in bourgeois literature, to the fore. But not only could communist writing condemn the working conditions under capitalism or celebrate the work of socialist construction (as we shall see in Chapter Two), it also proposed a new model of artistic and literary practice in which *creation* was to give way to *production*. In other words: literature itself came to be regarded as labor, with the worker-correspondent embodying the new synthesis between labor and literature. The aforementioned scholarship has often concentrated on this aspect, as in the following characteristic statement by Bernd Witte in 1976: "Literature is no longer an object of meditation, of meditative interiorization, but rather a human work process, serving first and foremost those who work upon it." (Witte, p. 16)[31] Witte's essay is couched in terms laid out by Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin, embracing fully the "author as producer" model as conceptualized by Benjamin in the early 1930s. What scholars like Witte have not done, however, is to critically engage the role of labor in communist discourse and the changes in the work process contemporaneous with the "author as producer" model. Therefore, the question I would like to pose at the outset is: why does labor theory enter

[31] "Literatur demnach nicht als Gegenstand der Betrachtung, der meditativen Verinnerlichung, wohl aber als menschlicher Arbeitsprozeß, der vor allem dem zugute kommt, der an ihr arbeitet."

so rarely into accounts of writing about industrial labor? Why do genre, on one hand, and matters of cultural policy and organization, on the other, dominate in them so clearly?

The answer – as this chapter will make clear – has to do with the contested nature of labor in communist thinking, writing, and practice at the time (and beyond). The alternative *Ford oder Marx* (Ford or Marx, the title of a 1925 book by the communist author Jakob Walcher) was often not seen as mutually exclusive, but rather complementary. Since the scholarship on proletarian literature during the 1970s and early 1980s tried to carve out a clearly demarcated space for its object of study in literary history, it presented it in clear contours vis-à-vis bourgeois literature. It therefore avoided the muddy waters of the debate on labor and rationalization in the Weimar Republic. Moreover, the relative absence of the category of 'labor' in the existing scholarship is all the more striking given the rich context of the creation and development of *Arbeitswissenschaft* (science of labor) after World War I.[32] What I propose to change, therefore, is the frame of reference for *Industrieliteratur*. My hypothesis is that an approach coupling sociological with aesthetic concerns can provide a more proper framework for the re-assessment of the writings about industrial life. Focusing on labor, rather than on purely literary aspects (along the lines of "Reportage oder Gestaltung?"

[32] For a comprehensive account of this issue, see Hinrichs (1976). Around the same time, the same discontent with Fordism/Taylorism occurred in the United States as well with Harry Bravermann's *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The degradation of work in the 20th Century* (1974), Studs Terkel's *Working* (also 1974), and, maybe most interestingly, the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare's 1972 report *Work in America*. In literary history of the 1970s, this new focus on the detrimental aspects of industrial labor was largely overlooked. A notable exception to my argument is Erhard Schütz' critique of Kisch's productivist enthusiasm in *Kritik der literarischen Reportage: Reportagen und Reiseberichte as der Weimarer Republik über die USA und die Sowjetunion* (1977). This critique, however, stems less from an interest in theories of work, I would argue, then from his defense of Lukács' conception of literature. Another exception are the essays in the 1980 collection of essays called *The Technological Imagination: Theories and Fictions* with its critical take on the technological utopianism of the Left avantgarde (see especially David Batrick's "Affirmative and Negative Culture: Technology and the Left Avant-Garde").

[Reportage or Portrayal], i.e. Lukács' essays on realism around 1930),[33] allows us to question the binary opposition between capitalist and communist organization of labor.

It also brings out an aspect of communist writing which has not received sufficient attention: its profound complicity with industrialism, despite its seeming opposition to it. In other words: in order to fully understand the linkages between economic and cultural life, between labor and literature, we ought to follow Fredric Jameson's contention that "social life is in its fundamental reality one and indivisible, a seamless web, a single inconceivable and transindividual process, in which there is no need to invent ways of linking language events and social upheavals or economic contradictions because on that level they were never separate from one another." (Jameson, 1981, p. 40) He urges us to undertake an exercise in *mediation* or *transcoding*, by which he means "the invention of a set of terms, the strategic choice of a particular code or language, such that the same terminology can be used to analyze and articulate two quite distinct types of objects or 'texts,' or two very different structural levels of reality." (Jameson, 1981, p. 40)[34] For the following discussion, I propose the closely related terms 'division of labor' and 'rationalization' as such codes. The complex ramifications of theses terms, which find application across different structural levels of social reality, will allow us to think economic and cultural life together. But in order to accomplish such a project, we first need to consider (at least in broad strokes) the social

[33] Having been sent to Berlin from Moscow, Lukács played a major role in the BPRS journal *Die Linkskurve*. In essays such as "Reportage oder Gestaltung" or Tendenz oder Parteilichkeit," he proposed a conception of proletarian literature based on 19th century realism.

[34] Mediation or transcoding here would not simply mean 'reflection,' i.e. the orthodox Marxist belief in the superstructure's mirroring of the productive forces. Rather, Jameson's conception allows for a more dynamic interaction between various levels of social life and ascribes to cultural artifacts the more active roles of production, projection, compensation, repression, displacement, etc. (See especially his discussion in *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 33-49)

and discursive context within which communist worker-authors chose industrial labor as a privileged site of textual representation.

THE SITUATION OF LABOR DURING THE WEIMAR YEARS

What was the situation of labor in the new Republic? Article 162 of the Weimar Constitution gestured towards socialist internationalism by stating that "the Reich calls for transnational agreements in labor legislation that would guarantee certain standards of social rights for the working classes of the entire world."[35] As vague as that clause might have been, it expressed an entirely new attitude when compared with the old Reich. It appears that, in the early years of the young Republic, the notion prevailed that labor now had the upper hand. In a commentary of the new *Arbeitsrecht* (labor legislation), Franz Goerrig stated in 1920:

> Members and sympathizers of the working class – even children of workers – have taken the highest positions of government. The whole apparatus was staffed more and more with working people ... Very hastily, almost all demands of the working classes were granted in the area of labor rights. (Goerrig, p. 7)

Goerrig creates the impression that the labor movement was almost fully in charge of the Weimar Republic. And there was indeed a lot of progress made: most importantly, the eight-hour workday was finally written into law. As Detlef Peukert explains, inflation helped the state in the early years of the Republic (1919-1924) to "finance state welfare benefits and the agreements on hours and other industrial questions

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[35] "Vertreter und Vertrauensleute der Arbeiter – selbst Kinder des Arbeiterstandes – sind in die höchsten Stellen der neuen Regierung eingerückt. Der ganze Regierungsapparat wurde mehr und mehr mit Mitgliedern des werktätigen Volkes durchsetzt ... Mit einer ungewöhnlichen Hast wurden fast sämtliche alten Forderungen der Arbeiterklassen auf dem Gebiete des Arbeitsrechtes verwirklicht."

that had been negotiated by the unions and employers." (Peukert, p. 65) Unemployment was extremely low, not least because millions of Germans had lost their lives in the war. The workers' standard of living increased slightly during this period, although it was still below pre-war standards, while entrepreneurs often managed to benefit greatly from inflation. In hindsight, Goerrig's assumption that talking about employers' rights in the Weimar Republic was almost nonsensical since labor was now so dominant was clearly erroneous.[36] He did not foresee the extent to which the Social Democrats compromised with the old elites of imperial Germany which became most violently obvious early on in the pact between President Friedrich Ebert and General Wilhelm Groener. On the economic front, Goerrig's assessment turned out to be wrong after 1923 at the latest, when most of labor's gains were rolled back (ironically, by the government headed by a chancellor named Marx). In the words of Eric D. Weitz,

> Employers were on the offensive; workers were battered and worn down by the economic crisis. The mine owners had taken the lead in September 1923, and every major industry quickly followed. By spring 1924, the prewar work shift, twelve hours in the factories, eight and one-half in the mines, had been reestablished. Employers also won greater freedom to fire workers at will and to ignore labor representation within the workplace. The crisis of hyperinflation enabled business to destroy – not totally, but to a significant degree – the social measures it had only reluctantly conceded in 1918-1919. (Weitz, 2007, pp. 142-143)

Hyperinflation had hurt workers and civil servants most dramatically, and their situation would remain precarious during the period that was to follow. This period is usually referred to as one of stabilization and rationalization and lasted from 1924-1929 (although popular histories often prefer the term "golden years" or "golden twenties"). For the labor movement, they were not golden for the most part, even though mass consumption began to reach across class lines – with many people spending beyond their

[36] See Goerrig, pp. 5-6 of part II of his study.

means. Instead, these years were marked by the rationalization drive that swept the Weimar economy in the wake of the inflation. The debate on rationalization had started right after the war, but grew in importance in the mid -1920s when its effects were felt more strongly (see Stollmann, p. 42-44). Stollmann cites the influx of U.S. capital in the wake of the Dawes plan (in effect since August 1924) as the main reason for increased rationalization. Wehler claims that the rationalization drive of the stabilization period was stronger than in any other country except for the United States, with productivity rates being increased by as much as 41% in steel production (25% on average) between 1925 and 1929 – and that despite massive lay-offs (Wehler, p. 256). A similar increase seems to have occured in the category of job-related accidents and illness: according to Hinrichs, the numbers in that area went up by up to 50 percent between 1924 and 1928. (Hinrichs, p. 56) Unemployment, even long-term unemployment that had beeen largely unknown before, was relatively high during this prosperous period. In 1926, for example, 2.1 million people (or 16.7 percent of the work force) were without a job. (Wehler, p. 256)

Rationalization took place not only in heavy industries, but in the white-collar sector, in agriculture, and in the private household as well. As we will see later, rationalization became a catch-all term that could mean anything from assembly-line work to a more efficient organization of one's kitchen. The overall effect of rationalization on the economy was at best ambivalent for the economy as a whole, and clearly hurt workers. Peukert observes that rationalization, despite greater productivity levels, created a host of problems for the German economy, such as higher unemployment, health risks for workers, and in general social inequality (Peukert, p. 122). Furthermore, rationalization was accompanied by massive deskilling. Only about

half of the cherished German *Facharbeiter* – well-trained workers who often took pride in prolonging their vocational family tradition – remained at the end of the 1920s due to wide-spread automation. At the same time, the demand for poorly educated and trained jobs increased sharply, both in the blue-collar and white-collar professions (the number of untrained female office workers, for example, increased by 500 percent).[37] Finally, well educated *Kopfarbeiter* (intellectual workers) found it increasingly difficult to make ends meet without entering the work-force. Alfred Weber's essay "Die Not der geistigen Arbeiter" (The Hardship of Intellectual Workers) of 1923 is the best-known analysis in this regard. In this text, the sociologist contends that truly *geistige Arbeit* – the German adjective can mean both intellectual and spiritual – cannot be subjected to the laws of the market. Since his analysis demonstrated that it was, however, he diagnosed a severe crisis of the very concept of intellectual work itself. (A. Weber, p. 623) Taken together, an evaluation of the sources suggests that the rationalization drive alienated workers of all kinds from the Republic on a permanent basis.

The situation of labor, of course, only got worse in 1929 with the outbreak of the world economic crisis, after inflation and stabilization/rationalization the third main phase of the Weimar economy. Now, unemployment became a reality for up to 50% of the German workforce, and the crisis management of the various short-lived governments further aggravated the situation. The labor movement, which seemed in charge of the Republic in its early phase, was effective only in its rejection of the system, and could point to a seemingly successful Soviet Union. At the same time, the industrial elite played a significant role in establishing authoritarian rule and the rise of National Socialism. (Kershaw, pp. 50-60)

[37] See Hinrichs, p. 59.

With no new major inventions in technology made during the 1920s, the economic issues that stand out most when looking at the Weimar Republic are rationalization and, even more iconic, unemployment. It is hardly surprising that communists, who were often the first ones to be forced out of their factories and other work places, condemned rationalization when it increased unemployment. At the same time, however, communism itself had an intricate relationship with rationalization. As we will see now, this fact led to a conflicting stance regarding not only rationalization, but also the communist understanding of technology, division of labor, progress – in one word: industrial modernity.

FORD OR MARX? THE AMBIGUITY OF WEIMAR COMMUNISM TOWARD THE DIVISION OF LABOR AND RATIONALIZATION

Despite the insistence on overcoming the division of labor in Marx' early work, Second- and Third-International Communism lost sight of this objective and instead fully embraced industrial society and its drive toward ever greater division of labor. The Soviet domination of the Comintern, against which the left wing of German socialism (especially Rosa Luxemburg) had agitated early on, set the tone for a rather uncritical embrace of industrialization and modernization by means of American imports such as Taylorism (more on that in Chapter Two). The positive view of Taylorism by the Communist International, of course, created a predicament for communists in Germany, a country in which this very same Taylorism threatened their own jobs. As Eric D. Weitz demonstrates, communists were indeed the ones to suffer most from lay-offs due to the rationalization drive gaining momentum in 1924: "From a movement inextricably rooted in the workplace-based protests of labor, the KPD became a party of the unemployed working class […]" (Weitz, 1997, p. 133) He cites a survey which estimates that, already

in 1924, 85% of the KP membership in the Ruhr area was unemployed. (Weitz, 1997, p. 144) This certainly explains why the best-known proletarian literature, such as Berta Lask's play *Leuna 1921* (1927), Karl Grünberg's *Brennende Ruhr* (Burning Ruhr, 1928), Hans Marchwitza's *Sturm auf Essen* (Storming Essen, 1930), or Willi Bredel's *Maschinenfabrik N. & K.* (Machine Factory N. & K., 1930), deals much more with strikes or armed struggles of workers against the forces of the reaction than with issues directly related to the work process.

Partly due to the phenomenal success of Henry Ford's autobiography *Mein Leben* in the Weimar Republic, however, communists were compelled to engage Ford's theories of higher productivity through increased rationalization within the framework of historical materialism. Even though it was mainly industrialists and engineers traveling to the United States and to Ford's factories,[38] Detroit became a popular destination also for communist authors. Grünberg's article "Das Ford-System" (System Ford) or Egon Erwin Kisch's "Bei Ford in Detroit" (At Ford in Detroit, in his *Paradies Amerika* of 1930), are both attempts to dismantle the myth of social peace between workers and industrialists, high wages, mass consumption, and good working conditions. In a more comprehensive account of Fordism, the aforementioned *Ford oder Marx* (Ford or Marx), published by the *Neuer Deutscher Verlag* in 1925, communist author Jakob Walcher also indicts Fordism. At the same time, however, he tries to turn some of its methods against their inventor. In fact, he goes as far as to claim the phenomenon of Fordism to be a decisive affirmation of Marxism.[39] He reaches this conclusion on the basis of a technological

[38] For a near-comprehensive account of the pilgrimage of Weimar industrialists to the U.S. in search of new industrial technologies and organization, see Nolan, pp. 18-29.

[39] "[…] daß Ford und seine Erfolge nicht nur keine Widerlegung, sondern eine geradezu glänzende Bestätigung des Marxismus bedeutet [...]" (Walcher, p. 5).

optimism which he shares with many of his communist contemporaries.[40] Drawing on Marx' *Capital* as well as on Engels' *Anti-Dühring*, he pursues two main goals regarding work under communism: the increasing importance of machinery on one hand, and the disappearance of the division of labor on the other. He states:

> The division of labor will be done away with. Communist society will overcome those negative aspects of capitalist labor that that numb the workers' intellectual aspirations, but not by the return to more primitive forms of production. Instead, communist society will go beyond it and utilize capitalist production technology in the service of a higher and more harmonious form of social production. (Walcher, p. 40)[41]

It should also be noted that Walcher is particularly interested in Fordism because, in his view, its extremely rigid division of labor within the production process, combined with utmost flexibility (should improved methods require it), already contains the seeds for a future communist organization of production. Since capitalism would already demand from the worker his absolute *Disponibilität* (availability, readiness), it already and unwillingly prepares the ground for changing occupations, activities, and interests on the part of the workers. (Walcher, p. 47)

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[40] Here, Walcher is essentially paraphrasing Trotsky who, in his *Problems of Everyday Life* of 1923, also envisions the end of divided labor by means of technological progress: "'But what about the monotony of labor, depersonalized and despiritualized by the conveyor?' I am asked […] This is a reactionary path. Socialism and hostility to machinery have never had and will never have anything in common […] There will always be branches of industry in society that demand personal creativity, and those who find their calling in production will make their way to them. What we are concerned with here is the basic type of production in its most important branches, *until at last a fresh chemical and power revolution in technology sweeps aside mechanization as we know it today*." (Trotsky, p. 244, my emphasis)

[41] "Die einseitige Teilarbeit wird aufgehoben werden. Die kommunistische Gesellschaft wird die geisttötenden, negativen Seiten der kapitalistischen Teilarbeit überwinden nicht durch Rückkehr zu primitiveren Produktionsformen, sondern indem sie über sie hinausgeht und die vom Kapitalismus entwickelte Produktionstechnik zur Grundlage einer höheren harmonischen Form der gesellschaftlichen Produktion macht." A very similar point was made by Prof. Ermanski, a Soviet labor theoretician, in *Die rote Fahne* on October 14, 1927 in his article "Wissenschaftliche Organisation der Arbeit" (Scientific Organization of Labor).

A similar argument about potentially positive effects of the division of labor and rationalization is made by communist economist Modest Rubinstein in an article entitled "Die kapitalistische Rationalisierung" (capitalist rationalization) in the journal *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus* (Under the Marxist Banner) in 1929. While dismissing most aspects of Fordism in capitalist society, Rubinstein praises the homogenization of the labor force it brings about – a position shared by theorists as diverse as Emile Durkheim and Antonio Gramsci. Rubinstein argues:

> Despite the extreme increase of specialization of individual labor, it is obvious that this same labor also becomes more collective. Together with the changing composition of the working masses, this fact will help in finally moving beyond the habits, traditions and prejudices of the old guilds. (Rubinstein, p. 294)[42]

Communist discourse on work, by stark contrast with anarcho-syndicalism (as well as with fascism[43]), was unable to lend credence to non-industrial forms of labor (including white-collar work). In the dominant view, all so-called "residual" forms of labor needed to be rooted out, and rationalization of production was seen as one way of getting there fast. Hence, it hardly comes as a surprise that the boundaries between rejection and appreciation of Taylorism and Fordism appear rather fluid. Consistency was

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[42] "Trotz der aufs äußerste steigenden Spezialisierung der individuellen Arbeit kollektivisiert sich für jeden augenscheinlich die Arbeit, und dies trägt neben den Veränderungen der Zusammensetzung der Arbeiterschaft zur endgültigen Űberwindung der handwerks-zünftlerischen Gewohnheiten, Traditionen und Vorurteile bei." Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci expressed the same idea in his essay "Americanism and Fordism" by saying that "Americanism simply (if violently) speeds up the process by which the old feudal and parasitic elites of old Europe cease to exist." (Gramsci, p. 317) At the same time, however, he states that Fordism has destroyed the link between art and labor that once was very strong in figures like the artisan and the demiurg. (Gramsci, p. 303) Durkheim's book *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893) is in large part a defense of the division of labor, even though he spends a considerable portion of his book on its negative application (the so-called 'anomic' division of labor).

[43] German fascism had it both ways: On one hand, it celebrated archaic peasant and craft labor; on the other, it pushed the industrial apparatus to an extreme (especially with regard to armament) and gave itself a decidedly 'modern' image. For this dual strategy, Jeffrey Herff has coined the term 'reactionary modernism'.

sought by maintaining a clear distinction between economic and technical rationalization.[44] In this framework, economic rationalization was believed to be in full agreement with Marxist thought. It simply meant rational, transparent, and socially just division of tasks and goods for the common good, with the 'planned' economy on the horizon.[45] Technical rationalization, on the other hand, was much more difficult to justify, as it usually implies an ever stricter division of labor, greater efficiency, and, not to forget, in the popular imagination it was associated with higher unemployment.[46]

But the two levels could not be differentiated easily on the level of practice. In 1931, the Austro-Marxist Otto Bauer therefore felt the need to introduce the notion of *Fehlrationalisierung* (misguided rationalization). Like Rauecker, he defended rationalization in principle, arguing that only socialist society could bring it to fruition. I agree with Gunnar Stollmann, however, that Bauer's theory provides little evidence that this future society would alter the then existing industrial division of labor. Especially the division between planning and execution was to be left untouched.[47]

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[44] See for example Bruno Rauecker's article "Die Bedeutung der Rationalisierung" (1926) in the journal *Die Arbeit*. Rauecker embraces Taylorism and Fordism in this article, in spite of having been one of the main critics of the so-called *Entleerung der Arbeit* (emptying of work) in the wake of their introduction into Germany. (Stollmann, p. 97)

[45] In another article in *Die Arbeit* with the title "Wege und Möglichkeiten der Rationalisierung" (Ways and Potentials of Rationalization, 1928), Rauecker illustrates this economic rationalization on the basis of international agreements which resulted in lower prices for consumers. (Rauecker, p. 751)

[46] To give one more example: in a wave of rationalization in 1926, Krupp in Essen reduced the work-force from 170,000 employees to 48.760. (Hinrichs, p. 29)

[47] See Stollmann's discussion of *Fehlrationalisierung*, pp.102-104.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE INDUSTRIAL WORKER

Communists investigated the physiological effects of industrial and other labor, but seldom its psychological implications. There was some understanding that Taylorism may cause psychological defects, but it did not extend to industrialism in general. But if we digress for a moment, we can see that there was a discourse on industrialism's disciplining effect on the workers' psyche; however, it had little influence on communist discourse – both literary and theoretical – on labor.

Already in 1880, Marx had composed a list of 100 questions for workers in which there are signs of an interest that goes beyond their purely material working and living conditions. But apart from several unsystematic treatments of the issue of workers' psychology outside of the labor movement (e.g. by Christian reformers[48]), it was not until 1908 that it found serious scholarly interest in the Verein für Sozialpolitik. In an empirical study for this institution, entitled *Zur Psychophysik der industriellen Arbeit* (On the Psychophysics of Industrial Labor), Max Weber points out the grave negative physiological and psychological implications of industrial labor and concludes that „the 'apparatus', as it is in existence today [...] has changed the spiritual face of mankind beyond the point of recognition and will continue to do so." (Weber, p. 41)[49] Even more fitting in our context is Alfred Weber's assessment as quoted by Max Weber at the end of his study:

> In a statement for the commission, A[lfred] Weber […] pointed out the following: That the structure of this peculiar 'apparatus', which the organization of

[48] Examples thereof are Paul Göhre's *Drei Monate Fabrikarbeiter und Handwerksbursche* of 1891 and Minna Wettstein-Adelt's *3 ½ Monate Fabrikarbeiterin* of 1893.

[49] "[...] der 'Apparat', so wie er heute ist [...] das geistige Antlitz des Menschengeschlechts fast bis zur Unkenntlichkeit verändert hat und weiter verändern wird."

> production of the large-scale industrial kind has 'slapped on the head' of the people, transcends in its fateful significance even the question of 'capitalist' or 'socialst' organization of production. The existence of this 'apparatus' as such is independent of this alternative. (Weber, p. 40, cursive in the original)[50]

Hugo Münsterberg, a German-born pioneer in applied psychology living in the United States, delivered the justification of the new science by claiming its absolute neutrality. In his study *Psychology and Industrial Efficiency* (1913), published in Germany as *Grundzüge der Psychotechnik* (1914), he writes:

> The psychotechnician is […] neither socialist nor anti-socialist, neither representative of capitalists nor of workers, neither partisan of buyers nor sellers. He only presupposes certain goals because they are of the most natural validity for everybody involved in economic matters.[51]

Due to the neglect of workers' psychology by the materialism of Weimar Marxist political culture and literature, contributions to this important discipline came again from the field of empirical sociology - by the Neo-Marxist Theodor Geiger, who introduced the aspect of mentality to questions of class[52], and, more importantly, from the early

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[50] "In einer […] Denkschrift für den Untersuchungsausschuβ hob A[lfred] Weber [...] hervor: daβ die Struktur jenes eigentümlichen 'Apparates', welchen die groβindustrielle Produktionsorganisation der Bevölkerung 'über den Kopf gestülpt' habe, in ihrer schicksalsvollen Bedeutung selbst die Tragweite der Frage nach 'kapitalistischer' oder 'sozialistischer' Organisation der Produktion übertreffe, weil das Bestehen dieses 'Apparates' *als solchen* von dieser Alternative *unabhängig* ist."

[51] "Der Psychotechniker ist […] weder Sozialist noch Anti-Sozialist, weder Vertreter der Kapitalisten noch der Arbeiter, weder Parteimann der Käufer noch der Verkäufer. Wenn der gewisse Ziele ohne Diskussion voraussetzt, so geschieht das nur, weil sie für jeden im wirtschaftlichen Leben stehenden gewissermassen als selbstverständlich gelten können." (quoted in Hinrichs, p. 41)

[52] Geiger defines 'mentality' as follows: "Die Mentalität dagegen ist geistig-seelische Disposition, ist unmittelbare Prägung des Menschen durch seine soziale Lebenswelt und die von ihr ausstrahlenden, an ihr gemachten Erfahrungen." (Mentality, on the other hand, is a mental and spiritual disposition, is the immediate imprint on men made by the social environment and the experiences stemming from it. [Geiger, p. 77]) However, Geiger does not pose a dichotomy between ideology and mentality. Rather, he finds mentality to be a productive concept in its ability to break through the rigidity of conceptions of ideology as distinct from everyday experience.

Frankfurt school's interdisciplinary materialism. Only when "philosophers, sociologists, economists, historians, psychologists […] were united in a constant work association", so Max Horkheimer, would it be possible systematically to throw light on the "connections between economic life […] the psychic development of the individual and cultural change."[53]

This approach generated Erich Fromm and Hilde Weiss' empirical project *The Working Class in Weimar Germany. A Psychological and Sociological Study* - begun in 1929 and based on a questionnaire composed of 271 items. Fromm included questions about attitudes and tastes, used psychoanalytic tools in order to interpret the results, and came to similar conclusions as Geiger: both pointed out a striking disconnect between answers to overtly political questions (that were usually answered according to the worker's party affiliation), and answers to questions pertaining to broader social and cultural issues that often betrayed an extremely bourgeois and/or authoritarian mindset. Interestingly enough, this disparity was recognized as well by the protagonists of *Psychotechnik* at the time. Hendrik de Man, professor for *Sozialpsychologie* at the University of Frankfurt since 1929, for example, who arrived at his conclusions through questionnaires as well, instrumentalized this incongruence between workers' class consciousness and their attitudes toward matters of everyday life in his fight over the increase of pleasure at work (*Steigerung der Arbeitsfreude*) – a campaign intended to eliminate class struggle by appealing to the greater cause of national productivity.[54]

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[53] quoted in Bonss, pp. 17-18.

[54] *Die rote Fahne* attacked De Man's "third way" between capitalism and socialism as "Verspießerung des Sozialismus" (embourgeoisement of socialism). (DrF, April 25, 1928)

Using Ernesto Laclau's more recent terminology addressing the same issues as Geiger and Fromm, we could theorize the split ideology of the Weimar working-class through the distinction between 'class interpellations' and 'popular-democratic interpellations.' In this conception, ideology is neither harmonious nor entirely based on class struggle. Instead, Laclau reminds us that individuals are constituted as subjects through a variety of interpellations – not all of which are class-based, but instead are more broadly 'popular-democratic' (based on religion, gender, etc.).[55] Hence, working-class culture and discourse remained deaf to projects such as Fromm's, and helpless vis-à-vis this new "science" of psychophysics as propagated by de Man, Giese, and others, precisely because it did not have the conceptual tools to even see this ideological split.

The attitude toward rationalization, as indicated by the Weimar workers in Fromm's questionnaire, is unambiguous. The largest number of those who responded to the questionnaire chose the answer 'Good only for employers, disadvantageous for the worker', while only a minimal number went with 'Bad under capitalist conditions.' This pattern reaches across party divides and levels of skill, indicating that rationalization was generally viewed as a menace to the working-class. The failure of communist industrial writing, of communist discourse as a whole, was the inability to furnish a real alternative to industrialization and the forms of work it produces. But not only was it unable to think

[55] See Laclau's *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (1979), especially the chapter "Fascism and Ideology" (pp. 81-142). There, he argues that "[T]he 'people' or 'popular sectors' are not, as some conceptions suppose, rhetorical abstractions or a liberal or idealist conception smuggled into Marxist political discourse. The 'people' form an objective determination: the people are one of the poles of the dominant contradiction in a social formation, that is, a contradiction whose intelligibility depends on the ensemble of political and ideological relations of domination and not just the relations of production" (Laclau, pp. 107-108).

beyond it; in spite of all the criticism, it shared with industrial capitalism the basic belief in rationalization and efficiency through technology.[56]

ARBEITERKORRESPONDENTEN ON LABOR IN THE COMMUNIST DAILY *DIE ROTE FAHNE*

After this preliminary discussion of highly ambiguous attitudes toward the division of labor and rationalization in communist discourse, we can now turn to the textual responses by worker-authors (*Arbeiterkorrespondenten*) to these phenomena. Their texts about labor in *Die rote Fahne* have to be viewed in the larger context of the explosion of non-fictional and semi-fictional literature in the 1920s. After the waning of Expressionism, New Objectivity, the more clearly partisan proletarian literature, and even the mostly *völkisch* literature about World War I all turned to social realities and their description. Two essays by Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller" and "The Author as Producer," can help us to understand the intricate connections between changes in the sphere of literature and those in the world of work (i.e., the mode of production). The figure of the storyteller, Benjamin argues, corresponds to the era of the artisan, and has vanished along with it. Depending on such figures as the 'resident tiller of the soil', the 'trading seaman', and a community of listeners, as well as on such mental conditions as boredom, self-forgetfulness, and the potential for experience, storytelling, according to Benjamin, had long ago lost its proper milieu.

> The storytelling that thrives for a long time in the milieu of work – the rural, the maritime, and the urban – is itself an artisan form of communication, as it were. It

[56] Apart from the empirical research I just outlined, the Weimar years also saw the publication of numerous pseudo-scientific treatises on the machine age and its impact on men (some fictional, but most of them non-fictional). Among them were Bruno Wille's *Der Maschinenmensch und seine Erlösung* (1930), Nikolaus Magyar's *Maschine gegen Mensch* (1933), Hanns Günther's *Die Befreiung des Menschen durch die Maschine* (1930) and Gerhard Menz' *Irrationales in der Rationalisierung: Mensch und Maschine* (1928).

> does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel. (Benjamin, 2002, pp. 91-92)

The novel, by contrast, belongs already to the realm of bourgeois abstraction, both in the way it is written and in the way it is read (i.e., not collectively, but individually). But the questioning of the novel during the 1920s by the demands of mass publishing, the distinctly "modern" sensibilities of New Objectivity, and by proletarian critics, did not signal the return of the storyteller; rather, it announced the advent of the journalist. This is Benjamin's point in "The Author as Producer," where he promoted the productivist aesthetics of Soviet writer and cultural activist Sergei Tret'iakov.

In Germany, one of the main protagonists and proponents of this turn to social realities was the Prague-born writer-journalist Egon Erwin Kisch. In *Die rote Fahne,* his position was explained as follows:

> Reportages have existed for a long time already. But there were times when the papers were filled with fictional and sentimental stories in which nobody cared about reality. Today it is acknowledged that the imagination of reality, of the naked facts, is much more powerful than fictional stories. (*DrF*, June 13, 1928)[57]

Naturally, workers took to the kinds of realities of working life that bourgeois literature, with minor exceptions, had not found worthy of representation until then. Indeed, those realities were for the most part not pretty, with worker's exploitation by industrialists and through machines being the most common theme to be found in *Die rote Fahne*. In a

[57] "Schon vor langen Zeiten gab es Reportagen. Dann aber kamen wieder Zeiten, in denen man die Zeitungen mit erfundenen, sentimentalen Geschichten füllte, in denen man nichts von der Wirklichkeit wissen wollte. Heute hat man erkannt, daß die Phantasie der Wirklichkeit, die Phantasie der nackten Tatsachen stärker ist als erfundene Geschichten." This statement reiterates the preface of Kisch's famous book *Der rasende Reporter* (The Roving Reporter) of 1925.

statistics it published in January of 1930, worker correspondences especially condemned matters of rationalization (even more frequently than other crucial themes such as wage issues, long working-hours, or lay-offs). (*DrF*, January 13, 1930) Frequently, the feuilleton incorporated texts about labor as well. I will focus on them since they present us with a more representative idea about labor by comparison with the location-specific correspondences found in the section called *Arbeiterkorrespondenten*.

What do these texts in the feuilleton of *Die rote Fahne* look like? Hardly any of them can be called fictional, even when written in the third, rather than the first, person; the dialog is often written in dialect in order to imbue it with local and proletarian color; they sometimes are location-specific, to the extent of naming the actual factory where the action is taking place; they always have, however, a narrative structure with the obvious goal to instruct the reader. The educational objective becomes clear at the end of the texts where one finds, almost invariably, a turning point generally characteristic of communist discourse on labor under capitalism: the larger part of the text can be seen as an indictment of alienated labor and rationalization under capitalism, whereas the last paragraph points out that there is nothing wrong with the industrial apparatus per se; what has to be changed is solely the ownership of the means of production.

From the large number of texts "arguing" along those lines, I will now discuss a sample in order to illustrate the pattern. The brief text "Fabriken" (Factories), which appeared on June 27, 1925, is credited to Paul Körner, but simply states "Von einem Arbeiter" (by a worker). The first three paragraphs of this early worker correspondence paint a gloomy picture of factories, portraying them as a near-transcendent force that renders the workers completely helpless: "They look like huge index fingers, rising up and threatening as if saying: Woe betide anyone who gets under our spell!'" (*DrF*, June

27, 1925)[58] But no matter how the factories and their machinery are depicted, the last paragraph makes clear that putting them under worker's control would be entirely sufficient. Körner writes:

> It will continue just like this, as long as the capitalist has his slaves, the workers, under the yoke of his labor. It will only change as soon as the proletarians with their hands – hands that so far toil for the parasites – will reach out to the factories and take possession of them collectively.[59]

Already Lenin's article on Taylorism, entitled "The Taylor System – Man's Enslavement by the Machine" (originally published in *Put Pravdy* in March of 1914) is structured in this way, prefiguring the Bolsheviks' road to "catching up" with the West in the sphere of industrial development.[60]

By sharp contrast with the infatuation with the machine of the various avant-gardes since Italian futurism (up to New Objectivity), the workers' correspondences in *Die rote Fahne* convey no such enthusiasm.[61] Like the factories in Körner's text,

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[58] "Wie riesige Zeigefinger sehen sie aus, die sich drohend emporrecken, als wollten sie andeuten: 'Wehe denen, die in unseren Bann kommen!'"

[59] "So wird es weitergehen, solange der Kapitalist die Sklaven, die Arbeiter in das Joch *seiner* Arbeit spannt. Anders aber wird es erst, wenn die Proletarier ihre Hände, die bisher nur für die Parasiten schafften – nach den Fabriken ausstrecken und diese in ihren *gemeinsamen* Besitz nehmen."

[60] While indicting Taylorism throughout the article, Lenin concludes: "The Taylor system—without its initiators knowing or wishing it—is preparing the time when the proletariat will take over all social production and appoint its own workers' committees for the purpose of properly distributing and rationalising all social labour. Large-scale production, machinery, railways, telephone—all provide thousands of opportunities to cut by three-fourths the working time of the organised workers and make them four times better off than they are today. And these workers' committees, assisted by the workers' unions, will be able to apply these principles of rational distribution of social labour when the latter is freed from its enslavement by capital." (Lenin, p. 154)

[61] For example, the Russian avantgardist Ehrenburg's novel *Das Leben der Autos* (The Life of Automobiles) was called „ein konterrevolutionärer Hymnus auf die Technik" (a counter-revolutionary hymn to technology) in *Die rote Fahne*. In this review of July 12, 1930, the author explicitly draws a line from Ehrenburgs novel to the Italian fascist Marinetti.

machines are often depicted as demonic mythological creatures, and the authors describe workers as being afraid of becoming machines themselves. In Erwin Kern's text "Das Pensum. Skizze aus einem Betrieb" (The Workload. Sketch from a Factory, published on February 21, 1926), the worker Weller is portrayed as suffering from the monotony of machine-tending. Kern writes:

> The belt is rattling in the same never-changing rhythm, the handle is striking up and down, the wheels are turning endlessly, in circles, everyday for nine hours in circles […] For six years Weller had been tending the machine. Got there in the morning, left in the evening, slowly but surely turned into a machine himself in this same endless rhythm. "At this job you'll be come a machine yourself," he thought, as the foreman explained the mechanism to him, six years ago.[62]

Weller no longer perceives his work-place as something over which he has control. When he finally tries to reassert his agency by striking down a foreman, the anonymous mechanisms of factory organization immediately take back control: "Weller struck down his foreman. And the system shut down all doors in the vicinity of machine 6484."[63] For a communist worker-author like Kern in 1926, however, it was unthinkable to call into question the benefits of industrialization, or to think and imagine beyond it. Instead, in the last paragraph, the just laid-off workers are determined to return to the factory and take control of it in the future.

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[62] "Im ewig gleichen Rhythmus klappert der Riemen, schlägt der Hebel auf und nieder, drehen sich Räder unaufhaltsam, immer im Kreis, jeden Tag neun Stunden lang, im Kreis [...] Sechs Jahre stand Weller nun an der Maschine. Kam morgens, ging abends, wurde allmählich selbst zur Maschine in diesem ewig gleichen Rhythmus. „Bei der Arbeit wirst du selbst zur Maschine", hatte er gedacht, als ihm der Meister zum ersten Mal den Mechanismus erklärte, vor sechs Jahren."

[63] "Weller hat seinen Vorgesetzten mißhandelt. Und vor der Maschine Nr. 6484 schlug das System unsichtbar alle Werkstüren weit im Umkreise zu."

In a similar text from March 1927 called "Die Fabrik" (The Factory), written anonymously "von einem Arbeiter" (by a worker), the indictment of industrial life is so severe that it seems to go beyond its capitalist organization. Already the abstract title "Die Fabrik" indicates that the author is highly critical of factories in general, not only of the particular one he is inspecting: "A modern factory. A muffled, monotonous droning welcomes me. A work song – or an indictment? I rush through this burning house full of shaft ovens in which a sea of flames rages. The air is full of poisonous gas."(*DrF* from March 25, 1927)[64] Yet, despite this starkly negative imagery of modern industrial life, the author still has a place to go, at least discursively: the Soviet Union, the place that "has accomplished so much more in ten years than any other freedom-loving people in hundreds of years."[65] The argument that the Soviet Union somehow manages to turn the woes of industrial life into a blessing relieves communist discourse from the necessity to think outside the box of industrialization.

Yet another anonymous text from around the same time (January 21, 1926), written as a Socratic dialog between two workers, hammers home the same point. It is entitled "Für oder gegen die Rationalisierung" (For or Against Rationalization). In it, the more class-conscious and politically active worker convinces the naïve, but interested worker that communists are not opposed to rationalization *per se*, but only to its capitalist variant. What becomes obvious in texts like this is that Weimar communists almost never talk about a fundamentally different ideal of work. Instead – and this pattern of thought

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[64] "Eine moderne Fabrik. Dumpfes, monotones Grummen empfängt mich. Arbeitslied – oder Anklage? Ich durcheile das Feuerhaus mit ungeheuren Schachtöfen, in denen ein Flammenmeer brandet und wogt. Die Luft ist mit Stickgasen erfüllt."

[65] "[…] Sowjetrußland[s], das in 10 Jahren mehr, wesentlich mehr geleistet hat als andere freitheitsliebende Stämme in Jahrhunderten fertig gebracht haben."

reaches back to utopian socialism of the 19th century – they envision a state of technological progress in which the work day could be significantly reduced. The dialog's more erudite conversant responds to the other's concern about machines replacing human beings:

> Under Socialism, workers will be transferred to other industries and the work day will be shortened once technical progress will allow this to happen. Then, we will have time for education, sports and entertainment just as it befits us.[66]

Again and again, one observes the same figure of thought, be it among anonymous or no-name authors like Kern, or in writers such as Karl Grünberg, the leading figure of the worker-correspondent movement. In an essay on Fordism, Grünberg condemns the introduction of the *seelenlosen Arbeitsautomaten* (soulless working automata) and *Fordleichen* (Ford corpses) in Germany, only to end in the following way:

> Having said that, we can also understand under which circumstances Fordism can be of service to men. Namely, when the means of production are in the workers' hands. Then, the workers will determine the pace of the conveyor, which – in and of itself – is nothing but the organizational improvement of the work process. (Grünberg, p. 56)[67]

All these texts, I argue, are by no means mere super-structural 'reflections' or 'expressions' of the economic base – neither of concrete working experiences of their authors, nor of the dominant communist thinking about work at the time. Rather, they

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[66] "Im Sozialismus wird man eben Arbeiter in eine andere Industrie überweisen und die Arbeitszeit verkürzen, wenn durch technische Fortschritte Kräfte frei werden. Dann bleibt auch Zeit für Bildung, Körperkultur und Unterhaltung, wie es dem Menschen zukommt."

[67] "Aus dem Gesagten erhellt auch bereits, unter welchen Umständen das Fordsystem für die Menschheit zum Nutzen gereichen könnte. Wenn nämlich die Produktionsmittel in den Händen der Arbeiter sich befinden. Dann wird die Arbeiterschaft das Tempo des Fliessbandes, das an sich nichts weiter als eine organisatorische Verbesserung des Arbeitsprozesses ist, regeln."

perform a much more active discursive role in that each of them attempts to resolve a fundamental aporia within Marxist thought and practice – the simultaneous rejection *and* embrace of the industrial division of labor and rationalization.[68] This certainly holds true on the level of content, where all of the aforementioned texts first reject capitalist rationalization, and later embrace its socialist variant. They are, to again use Ulrich Beck's term, part of the grand *Ma(r)x-Weber-Modernisierungskonsens* which prevented (and prevents) the division of labor from being questioned, and a different organization of work from being implemented.[69]

The knowledge they produce shares a common terrain with the one produced by economic thought. As mentioned in the introduction, Joseph Vogl has called this common terrain *Wissenszusammenhang*, i.e., a constellation of knowledge in which literature and economic thought are equally situated.[70] From the recognition of this intricate relationship, we can gain a foothold for an understanding of the discursive strategies employed by our worker-authors. It is not only on the level of content, but also

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[68] This is one of Hannah Arendt's main points in *The Human Condition*: "[…] the fundamental contradiction which runs like a red thread through the whole of Marx' thought, and is present no less in the third volume of Capital than in the writings of the young Marx. Marx' attitude toward labor, and that is toward the very center of his thought, has never ceased to be equivocal. While it was an 'eternal necessity imposed by nature' and the most human and productive of man's activities, the revolution, according to Marx, has not the task of emancipating the laboring classes but of emancipating man from labor; only when labor is abolished can the 'realm of freedom' supplant the 'realm of necessity.'" (Arendt, p. 104)

[69] Beck views capitalism and socialism as the two main allies (rather than antagonists) of what he calls "simple modernization." His own conception of "citizens' work" (*Bürgerarbeit*) departs radically from the premises on which both industrial capitalism and socialism are founded (see for example his *The Reinvention of Politics. Rethinking Modernity in the Global Social Order* of 1993).

[70] Vogl writes in his *Kalkül und Leidenschaft. Poetik des ökonomischen Menschen* of 2004: "Die Möglichkeit einer Beziehung zwischen Literatur und Ökonomie (oder bestimmten Wissensfeldern überhaupt) liegt nicht in einer Widerspiegelung, sie liegt weder in einem Abbildverhältnis noch in einer Beziehung von Text und Kontext oder in einer Relation zwischen Stoff und Form. Die Konjunktion von 'Literatur' und 'Ökonomie' verfolgt hier vielmehr den Zweck, das Wissenssubstrat poetischer Gattungen und die poetische Durchdringung von Wissensformen aufeinander zu beziehen und beide damit im Milieu ihrer Geschichtlichkeit festzuhalten." (Vogl, p. 14)

on a more fundamental, formal level, that their texts affirm industrial modernity/modernization. In their defense of rationalization, they are themselves deeply implicated in the movement of rationalization, now understood not as the specific implementation of new and more efficient production technologies and the quest for higher productivity rates, but understood more broadly: as the larger category through which Max Weber conceptualized industrial modernity as a whole (not least through the metaphor of the 'iron cage', through which he – like Michel Foucault later – linked industrial waged labor with discipline and domination[71]).

Interestingly enough, Weber arrived at his grave concerns about the division of labor and rationalization of industrial capitalism (or socialism) by means of the utmost rationalistic method of scientific inquiry, founding the 'discipline' of "value-free" sociology precisely at a time when the division of labor within the sciences had severed it from political science.[72] We could therefore say that Weber, while having doubts about the industrial division of labor and rationalization, reifies them on the level of his writing. The same, I will go on to argue, can be said about the worker-authors of *Die rote Fahne*. Not only does their discursive strategy provide a (illusory) textual solution to a real contradiction in Marxist theory and communist practice at the time. Their underlying conception of literature and literary practice rests heavily on the very same phenomena of division of labor and rationalization which their texts both condemn and defend. Much unlike the storyteller, the author-journalist is himself an expression of the process of

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[71] See especially Weber's *Protestant Ethics,* chapters 2, 10, 11, and 14 (esp. pp. 1148-1157) of his *Economy and Society*, and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (esp. pp. 135-169).

[72] See the discussion about the birth of sociology in British sociologist Scott Lash's essay "Reflexivität und ihre Doppelungen: Struktur, Ästhetik und Gemeinschaft," (Lash, p. 284).

laborization, which Hannah Arendt diagnoses for modern industrial societies in her book *The Human Condition*.

THE CONVEYOR BELT: THE PRIME EXAMPLE OF CAPITALIST RE-ENGINEERING

The debate about the conveyor belt deserves special attention, as it brings together most of the aspects discussed so far. It was by far the single most talked and written-about innovation for industrial production at the time, known at the time under names such as *Fließband*, *laufendes Band*, *Laufband*, *sich kettenartig fortbewegender Wandertisch*, *Arbeitstisch*, and, referring pejoratively to the American Dawes plan, *Dawes-Kette*. The first conveyor in Germany was installed in 1923 at the Berlin Opel factory, but its iconic role greatly exceeded its actual use in the Weimar industry. Conveyor belts were almost exclusively used by a small number of large-scale production facilities (i.e., by only about 3 percent of German companies where, however, a significant proportion of workers was employed).[73]

Proletarian literature dealt with the conveyor in numerous texts, and the communist critic Bela Balázs – as I mentioned in the introduction – used the image to clearly distinguish proletarian art from *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) by calling the latter the *Ästhetik des laufenden Bandes* (aesthetics of the conveyor belt). Naturally, the conveyor was also widely discussed on the pages of *Die rote Fahne*.

As we have seen in the introduction a propos Gamma's "Prosit Dawes-Kette", already in 1925, with the conveyor a relatively new phenomenon and in the context of a seemingly stabilized economy, the conveyor was viewed extremely negative. And its image only worsened after 1929. In May of 1930, in the midst of the economic crisis, the

[73] See Hinrichs, p. 50.

feuilleton of the communist daily published a worker's correspondence with the title "Der Magnethammer" (the magnetic hammer). Since the author must have worked at the Berlin Ford factory at the time, only his first name, 'Walter', is indicated, most likely in order to protect his identity from persecution by the factory's management. From his account of the daily routine on the shop-floor emerges the popular sentiment against the rationalization of work during the Weimar years, and especially during the Great Depression. Subjected to an ever-accelerating pace of production that came with new technologies imported from the United States (conveyor belt, magnet hammer), 'Walter' is forced to stick nails in his mouth, use his tongue to push them forth between his lips one by one, and finally puts the hammer close enough to his mouth so that the magnet could extract the nail from it. Walter, like the other workers, "prefers" the bleeding of his gums, lips, and tongue over the threats by foremen which were the inevitable result of not being able to keep up with the pace of the conveyor.

In the end, however, Walter makes clear that it is only the pace of the conveyor which has to be changed and, again, reproduces the apologetic structure we have witnessed so far in the aforementioned texts by anonymous worker correspondents, Grünberg, Körner, Kern, and Gamma, as well as in the theoretical treatises by Walcher, Rauecker, Bauer, Rubinstein, and many others. Interestingly enough, I have found only one text (called "Der Tischler" [the carpenter], published on February 19, 1931) in which a certain nostalgia for artisanal work is made explicit. Significantly, this text is unique among the ones I surveyed inasmuch as it is written by a female author, Gertrud Ring.

THE DENIGRATION OF WHITE-COLLAR WORK

With few exceptions, I have so far outlined an overwhelmingly male-dominated debate, with women often relegated to motherhood and the recreation of male labor power, or - more "progressively" – to androgynous worker-comrade. A good illustration how gender roles were narratively constructed is Grünberg's *Die brennende Ruhr* (1928). In this novel, the petit-bourgeois-turned-worker hero is torn between two women: one beautiful and seductive, the other manly and class-conscious. Naturally, their division of labor in the narrative economy is such that the former lures him into the circles of the reactionary *Freikorps*, while the latter sacrifices herself in the armed fight of the red against the white (i.e., royalist) forces. Women working outside the industrial sector generally received little attention in the communist discourse on work until the late 1920s. And once they did – by the end of the 1920s, the fast-growing and predominantly female white-collar sector became hard to ignore[74] – we see a fundamentally different attitude toward it by comparison with blue-collar work. It is striking that the articles in *Die rote Fahne* concerning rationalization in the white-collar sector all lack the positive resolve we have seen in treatments of industrial rationalization.

For example, a review of an exhibition of the latest developments in office equipment with the title "Mechanisierung des Kontors" (Mechanization of the Office) that appeared on October 11, 1928, spends a lot of time condemning inventions aimed at greater efficiency (type-writers, accounting machines, etc.). While this is fully consistent with writings about industrial innovations, the article does so without gesturing toward these inventions being useful "in and of themselves", i.e. outside of capitalist relations of production. And when the life of white-collar workers in the USSR was portrayed, as in

[74] According to Hans-Ulrich Wehler's recent social history of the Weimar Republic, one third of the work force was employed in the service sector by 1925. (Wehler, p. 237)

"Der Angestellte in der Sowjetunion" (The White-Collar Worker in the Soviet Union) of January 17, 1931, the worker correspondent chose to focus on the semi-industrial and "male" work of a machine designer – still a 'producer' and not a member of the growing army of typists and sales clerks whom Siegfried Kracauer described in his influential study *Die Angestellten* (The White-Collar Workers) of 1930. Since Kracauer's analysis was based on his characterization of white-collar workers as *geistig obdachlos* (intellectually/spiritually homeless) and certainly not particularly prone to possess class-consciousness, it triggered a rather negative review in *Die rote Fahne* (on January 17, 1931). By then, the communist daily had sought to claim white-collar workers as part of the struggle for revolution – the new rubric under which the aforementioned article about white-collar work in the Soviet Union appeared was called "Die Angestellten erwachen" (The White-Collar Workers Are Awakening). The white-collar workers readers of the Feuilleton *Die rote Fahne* could encounter were – contrary to actual numbers – predominantly male and members of the communist party. Kurt Steffen's "Ein Büro" (An Office) ends with the following conversation among freshly laid-off accountants:

> "You have to finally understand […] that we small white-collar workers are worse off even than workers. But look at the people in our sector – almost everybody has an incorrigible attitude. Only few think of themselves as workers. Most make faces when you mention communists. But the communists are fighting for us…"
>
> "Yes, unfortunately that it so," said young Werfer.
>
> "Now we will have elections soon and I am sure most of 'em will vote for parties our bosses vote for as well."
>
> "I don't think so," Pinner replied. "We are literally driven toward the communists!"
>
> "Yes, we are driven toward them," said Stiller.[75]

[75]"'Sie müssen endlich einsehen [...] uns kleinen Angestellten geht es schlimmer als den Arbeitern. Aber schauen Sie sich die Leute in unserer Branche an, fast jeder hat einen unverbesserlichen Fimmel. Die

Other treatments of white-collar work exhibit the same movement toward class-consciousness. In the short narratives "Warum Peter lächelte" (Why Peter was Smiling) and "Der Liftboy" (The Elevator Boy), both of which appeared on August 13, 1930, white-collar workers are agitating for the communist party at their respective workplaces and thereby risk to get laid off. Once Peter does get laid off in Curt Braun's text, he finally shows the smile he could not muster when his superiors exhorted him to do so for the sake of increasing sales: "Only few people smile when they get fired, but he did. He knew that there will be a time when the record will be set straight. And he left."[76]

In all these texts, there is little evidence for the "dignity of labor" attitude we can see in accounts of industrial labor. Often faced directly with the sellable commodities and their customers, white-collar workers, by stark contrast with blue-collar workers, are shown as strongly implicated in the logics of commodity fetishism which is less transparent in the factory than in the department store. Moreover, with the economic crisis of 1929, polemics against *Doppelverdiener* (dual wage-earners) and subsequent demands that women stay home were commonly voiced on all sides of the political spectrum. Hence, the male and class-conscious white-collar workers portrayed in *Die rote Fahne* fight against their supposed "feminization" in the Weimar consumer culture. The illustration to the aforementioned "Warum Peter lächelte" shows Peter at work in the department store, selling seemingly expensive fabric to a bourgeois female customer. The

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wenigsten rechnen sich zu den Arbeitern. Wenn es heißt 'Kommunisten', dann rümpfen viele die Nase. Dabei kämpfen die Leute für uns...' – 'Das ist leider so', rief der junge Werfer. 'Jetzt kommt die Wahl, ich bin überzeugt, sogar die meisten von ihnen werden Parteien wählen, die unserem Bürovorsteher genehm sind.' – 'Das glaube ich kaum', entgegnete Pinner. 'Man wird zu den Kommunisten förmlich getrieben!' – 'Ja, man wird zu ihnen getrieben', erwiderte die Stiller."

[76] "Wohl wenig Menschen gibt es, die bei der Entlassung lächeln. Er lächelte. Er wußte, daß bald die Zeit kommt, wo alles zurückgezahlt wird. Und so ging er."

temporarily feminized male producer and the quintessential female consumer – these two characters are the pillars of the communist imagination of white-collar work during the Weimar Republic.

THE INDUSTRIALIZATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Weimar workers not only recognized the conveyor belt as a dehumanizing mechanism during the work process, but also outside of the factory or the office. For example, in May of 1927, *Die rote Fahne* published four essays by children who describe their families as suffering from rationalization and from the conveyor in particular. In "Meine Mutter ist rationalisiert" (My mom has been rationalized), a child describes the disintegration of family life after the introduction of the assembly-line on the job. As Sigrid Jacobeit has recently demonstrated in "Die Küche – Fabrik der Hausfrau" (The kitchen – factory of the housewife), rationalization clearly also extended into the private sphere.[77]

Similarly, the hospital was viewed as changing dramatically under the impact of Taylorism and Fordism. On July 3, 1930, *Die rote Fahne* published a correspondence by Kurt Huhn with the title "Menschenreparatur am Fließband" (conveyor-style repair of human beings). In this piece, Huhn portrays the health care system as being in full accordance with output-oriented production principles in the factory. In fact, as the workers are sent to the doctor by the factory's management, the medical personnel has strict orders to return patients to work as soon as possible – regardless of their respective condition. Huhn writes: "We were sent away perfectly healthy, no matter how sick everybody was. 'That's what I would call quick service', I remarked. ‚Yes, unnecessary

[77] See especially Jacobeit, pp. 212-231.

waiting just makes you nervous', the doctor responded. [...] The conveyor belt of examinations moved on."[78]

While Huhn's account does not explicitly make a connection between the treatment and the cause of the injuries at the factory hospital, Hans Marchwitza's similar correspondence from February of 1931 makes clear that both – the injuries and the assembly-line treatment thereof - have the same cause which is at the same time the title of the correspondence: "Rationalisierung."

If we recall the earlier discussion of industrial workers' psychology, we can see what is missing in such workers' correspondences as the ones cited above. Being solely concerned with the formal ownership of the means of production, the worker-authors neglect the efficacy of these means themselves, while the above-quoted assessment by Alfred Weber upheld the view that their actual usage may be independent of the alleged alternatives capitalism or socialism. But Marxist thinking during the 1920s did not make use of its conceptual tools to grasp the division of labor of any industrial economy as a problem. In fact, still in 1970 could Alfred Sohn-Rethel claim that Marxist theory was lacking the awareness of the fundamental problem of the separation of manual and intellectual labor and its fossilization in industrialized societies.[79] He claims:

> Social unity of head and hand, however, characterises communist society whether it be primitive or technologically highly developed. In contrast to this stands the social division between mental and manual labor – present throughout the whole history of exploitation and assuming the most varied forms. (Sohn-Rethel, p. 85)

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[78] "Wir wurden gesund wieder weggeschickt,wie krank auch jeder war. ‚Das nennt man fixe Bedienung', bemerkte ich. ‚Ja, unnötiges Warten regt nur auf', sagte der Arzt. [...] Das Fließband der Untersuchung rollte weiter."

[79] "Thus a historical-materialist explanation of the originas of scientific thought and its development is one of the areas by which Marxist theory should be extended. There is furthermore a lack of theory of intellectual and manual labor, of their historical division and the conditions for their possible reunification." (Sohn-Rethel, p. 3)

It is certainly true that Marxist orthodoxy since the Second International paid little attention to this problem, but I would disagree with Sohn-Rethel that it has never been an essential part of Marxist thought and culture. What about the worker correspondent movement itself? Do we not witness there the attempt to unify manual and intellectual work in the union of worker and writer? Can we not see here the de-differentiation[80] of formerly specialized spheres? Certainly, this was one of the main driving ideas behind the movement, as well as behind proletarian culture in general. After all, one of the key terms for proletarian cultural politics since the initial success of Proletkul't in the Soviet Union was 'monism', i.e. organization of life around one basic principle. In hindsight, the first problem of this kind of 'monism' was that there was only one legitimate candidate for this one foundational principle: work/labor. And if this principle was usually thought to be work, then we still need to ask what kind of work was supposed to become the basic principle of social cohesion. In order to answer that question, we need to look at the kind of synthesis between labor and literature/art German communism propagated during the 1920s.

CREATIVE WORKERS OR WORKING ARTISTS?

Since we witnessed a wide-spread sentiment against the conveyor belt – the main symbol of the division of labor and rationalization at the time – in the texts by the worker-correspondents, it may come as a surprise that it is the very same conveyor which

[80] Fredric Jameson introduces this term in an essay called "Future City" with respect to multi-disciplinary research and postmodernity whose "law of being is de-differentiation, and in which we are most interested in how things overlap and necessarily spill across the disciplinary boundaries." (Jameson 2003, p. 69) However, it also can be utilized in response to Niklas Luhmann's theory of differentiation, which Jameson discusses throughout his book *A Singular Modernity* (Jameson, 2002, pp. 82-94).

allows us to make a transition to communist literary theory at the time. The point here is not that revolutionary pamphlets were occasionally transported on the conveyor belt – even if that truly was a suggestion made by V. Demar in his essay "Die Rationalisierung der Produktion und die politische Arbeit im Betrieb" (Rationalization of Production und Political Work at the Factory) in 1927 – but that some influential communist literary theorists saw in the conveyor a model for literary production – just as Trotsky saw in it a model for the entirety of social life.[81] To be sure, this technological optimism was more prevalent in the Soviet Union than in Germany, but it was imported into Germany through *Die rote Fahne* and other communist institutions and publications – most of which were part of communist Willy Münzenberg's media empire (such as the *Internationale Arbeiter Hilfe* [International Workers Aid] or the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* [Workers Illustrated Newspaper]) – long before Walter Benjamin's 1934 essay "The Author as Producer," in which he essentially adopts Sergei Tret'iakov's ideas.

We should distinguish here between two influential positions in literary theory during the 1920s that both fought against the bourgeois understanding of literary interiority/inwardness (*Innerlichkeit*) and proposed, in its stead, a more mechanistic model. Russian formalism focused on textual 'production' and tried to de-individualize it by maintaining that the text would be composed of 'devices'. In this view, the history of literature has no need for specific authors, as it 'is being written' by 'creative necessity' (e.g. Tynianov, p. 42).

The second position, i.e. the new proletarian literature, attacked formalism for its alleged blindness to material realities, and instead was interested in changing the socio-economic conditions in search for a truly collective literary production. Especially the

[81] See especially the essay "The conveyor principle of socialist economy" (pp. 298-302) in his *Problems of Everyday Life* of 1925.

idea of the fusion of industrial worker and artist, of Proletkul'tist descent, was the founding principle of the worker correspondent movement, and Tret'iakov's dictum "Writers to the Kolkhoz" (*pizately na kolkhoz*) was widely disseminated in the German communist press (if not in the exact same words). In September of 1930, for example, *Die rote Fahne* dedicated the entire feuilleton to an exhibit of the Soviet *October* group (*Oktiabr*). The title of the page reads "Der Künstler wird Industriearbeiter" (The Artist Becomes an Industrial Worker) and the article is a summary of the presentations by the Soviet artists Gutnoff and Tagiroff. 'Writers to the Kolkhoz' is here changed to 'Aus den Ateliers in die Betriebe' (From the Art Studios to the Factories) – certainly, the factional battles would have prevented a member of the *October* group to use the same slogan as Tret'iakov who was a member of *LEF*. But the position is essentially the same. They state:

> The artist should not be concerned with his artistic personality, but be involved with the improvement of the condition of the workers. Art which does not challenge the class enemy, which does not aim at changing life forms (as an ideological and industrial-collectivist method or production) is socially useless art. In the era of industrialization and collectivization, the artist has to rid himself from 'aesthetic' idiosyncrasies; he has got to put all his strength in the service of the collective tasks of our new society, especially of industrial construction and factories. (*DrF*, October 19, 1930)[82]

The article further mentions that only six members of the October group still worked in studios, while 240 of them actually worked at the factory.

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[82] "Der Künstler soll nicht um die Ausprägung seiner künstlerischen Persönlichkeit sorgen, sondern hauptsächlich an der Verbesserung der Lebenslage der Arbeiterschaft mitwirken. Eine Kunst, die keine Klassenfeinde herausfordert, die nicht die Veränderung der Lebensformen bezweckt (als ideologische und industriell-kollektivistische Methode der Produktion), ist eine unbrauchbare, eine sozial-zwecklose Kunst. In der Epoche der Industrialisierung und der Kollektivisierung muß der Künstler alle persönlichen ‚ästhetischen' Sonderheiten abstreifen; er muss seine gesamten Kräfte den kollektiven Aufgaben der neuen Gesellschaft, insbesondere den Industriewerken und Fabriken widmen."

Despite the highly different social and political circumstances in Germany and the Soviet Union, this idea of a unity of art and industrial labor was embraced also by German communists. While rejecting the similar project of constructivism as bourgeois,[83] communist literary critics such as Gertrud Alexander, Wieland Herzfelde, Edwin Hoernle, or Oskar Kanehl called for the erasure of the separation of artist and worker by making the worker the only legitimate artist: "The proletarian artist is located in the factory – as a proletarian, and never in his capacity as artist."[84] The term *Kunstwerk* (work of art), with its pre-industrial connotations, nearly disappeared from communist discourse in favor of *Produktion*, its industrial counterpart.[85] The adoption of Soviet Marxism by German communists, despite the social and political differences between the two countries, would eventually amount to nothing less than the stifling of thought and cultural activity. As Jameson notes, the theoretical devices of 'mediation' or 'transcoding', which I have used here for analytic purposes, would in Soviet Marxism be replaced by 'expressive causality':

> Stalin's 'expressive causality' can be detected, to take one example, in the productionist ideology of Soviet Marxism, as an insistence on the primacy of the forces of production. In other words, if all the levels of production – nationalization and the elimination of private property relations, as well as industrialization and modernization – will be enough 'more or less rapidly to transform the whole superstructure,' and cultural revolution is unnecessary, as is the collective attempt to invent new forms of the labor process. (Jameson, 1981, p. 37)

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[83] See for example G.G. Alexander's article "Kunst, Künstler und Proletariat" (quoted in Albrecht, pp. 538-543).

[84] "Der proletarische Künstler ist im Betrieb. Und zwar als Proletarier. Nie in seiner Eigenschaft als Künstler" (Kanehl, "Kunst und Künstler im Proletariat" [art and artists in the proletariat], cited in Albrecht, p. 530).

[85] See for example Herzfelde's "Gesellschaft, Künstler und Kommunismus" (printed in Albrecht, pp. 543-547).

Applied to the present topic, this pronouncement implies: Weimar communist *Industrieliteratur*, in fully embracing the productivist ideology of industrial (rational(ized) and divided) labor and even taking industrial labor as a model for its own literary practice, consented to its subordination to industrial life, left without the ability to critique it. In this sense, the *Industrieliteratur* under scrutiny starts to resemble what Pierre Bourdieu, in his *The Rules of Art*, calls 'industrial literature': a literature so heteronomous (i.e., dependent on the market and/or 'technocracy') as to completely renounce the autonomy of its conditions of production.[86]

In trying to re-integrate art and literature with everyday life – a noble Marxist goal – communist cultural theory and practice during the Weimar Republic aimed at realizing this synthesis under the leadership of a narrowly understood conception of work as industrial labor. This idea of an *Industrieliteratur* in the sense of a now truly 'industrialized literature', I argue, runs across the different factions within proletarian culture, and, as I will go on to demonstrate in the next chapter, fed on the industrial euphoria in the Soviet Union.[87] With so many Germans and especially communists out of work, and with the world economic crisis seemingly proving the superiority of Soviet

[86] Bourdieu goes as far as calling Gramsci's "organic intellectual" a dangerous illusion: "Cultural producers will not find again a place of their own in the social world unless, sacrificing once and for all the myth of the 'organic intellectual' (without falling into the complementary mythology of the mandarin withdrawn from everything), they agree to work collectively for the defense of their own interests." (Bourdieu, p. 348).

[87] To be sure, the larger part of the Russian émigré community in Germany itself was non-proletarian and lived in Germany (mainly in Berlin or, more specifically, "Charlottengrad") for political reasons. For the larger context of German-Russian cultural exchange, see John Willet's *Art & Politics in the Weimar Period: The New Sobriety, 1917- 1933* (NY: Pantheon, 1978). Fritz Mierau's *Russen in Berlin. Literatur Malerei Theater Film 1918-1933*. (Leipzig: Reclam 1987). And the catalogue *Berlin-Moskau / Moskau-Berlin 1900-1950* (München: Prestel-Verlag 1995).

communism, Russian models of labor played an increasingly important role for a German communist discourse on labor that was in serious need of positive content.

Chapter 2: German Communists and Soviet Industrialization: The Problem of Uneven Development

> In which direction is the development of methods of regulating labor in fact proceeding, in the direction of piecework or in the direction of the conveyor method? Everything points to the conveyor […] For 'the well-being of your fellow citizens' it is necessary to separate Fordism from Ford and to socialize and purge it. This is what socialism does. (L. Trotsky, *Problems of Everyday Life*)

Let us begin again with an image from *Die rote Fahne*. The sketch that appeared under the title "In der Sowjetunion herrscht der Arbeiter" (In the Soviet Union Rules the Worker) on January 20, 1927 (figure 2) replaces photographic realism with constructivism. We see an over dimensional industrial worker amidst an abstract miniature industrial landscape composed mainly of factories, trains, and electrical towers. Since, as the caption below indicates, the worker "organizes and defends" socialist production, it is significant that he clearly towers over the machinery portrayed, with his head beginning above its limits. In addition to this dominance in size, the worker holds on to the electric cables as if he were a puppeteer moving the industrial machinery at his will. Aside from the fact that this would be a dangerous thing to do in reality, it also makes him a part of the apparatus rather than a sheer supervisor. Holding cables in both hands, he becomes a real transmitter of electricity, a part of the electrical circuit. And while the image's intention clearly was to portray the Soviet worker in charge of the industrial apparatus, one cannot help but wonder who is puppet and who is puppeteer. In the context of the "man versus machine" discourse which we have discussed above, the

worker could also appear as a figure from the machine room of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (also 1927), with the worker now being moved by the machinery rather than moving it.

Furthermore, and against the usual demand made in communist discourse to show workers in their concrete relations of production, the image shows only one single worker (rather than a collective process) and remains on an abstract level: the dissemination of the new Soviet ideal of work in Germany, as we shall see, curiously avoided the concreteness of the labor process and focuses on the alleged success of industrial progress instead.

To systematically and comprehensively reconstruct the vast literature about the Soviet Union during the 1920s would require a different study.[88] Just as German industrialists and engineers flocked to Ford's Detroit, Marxists were drawn to the Soviet Union like moths to the flame. This "Marxist tourism," whether of purely economic or cultural interest, went – in a sense – back to the future. On one hand, the Soviet Union was still considered 'backward' in terms of economic development. At the same time, however, the impression prevailed among the German travelers that they had caught a glimpse of the future – the future of the new man, of a new society and culture, the future of work. Many a deficiency encountered there could be brushed aside by pointing to "backwardness": the Czarist past, the dominance of agriculture, the Civil War, or bourgeois sabotage of socialist construction. Socialism itself was regarded as a merely transitional phase, a mixed mode of production, only after the completion of which full-fledged communism could come into being.

[88] For the complex history of pro-Soviet and anti-Soviet sentiment in Weimar Germany, see Gerd Koenen's study *Der Russland-Komplex. Die Deutschen und der Osten 1900-1945* (München: C. H. Beck: 2005).

Re-evaluating Marxist discourse today, however, especially after the important interventions of (post)colonial studies, confronts us with the task of questioning the logic of the two alternatives 'backwardness' versus 'industrialization'. In other words, we need to deal with the issue of what Ernst Bloch called *Ungleichzeitigkeit* (non-simultaneity or non-synchronicity) of modes of production. Initially, Bloch used this concept from the early 1920s in explaining the rise of fascism's regressive ideology. As we shall see later, he went on to turn it against the tide of Soviet communism and its drive to flatten local traditions in favor of modernization. Since then, it has become a useful concept for both economic and cultural analysis, especially in calling into question the inevitability of "development" for "under-developed" regions – a *Fortschrittsdeterminismus* (determinism of progress) essential to both capitalist and socialist ideology.[89] In our context, the issue is naturally of great importance due to the extreme differences between the two countries in question (and it will be even more central for the second part of this study).

George Grosz and Wieland Herzfelde were very much aware of the issue of non-synchronicity of Germany and Russia. They were right on the mark when, in "Die Kunst ist in Gefahr" (Art is in Danger, 1925), they pointed to the stark difference regarding technology in the Soviet Union vis-à-vis the West: while the enthusiasm in the Soviet Union was a natural reflex of the beginning industrialization, in the West technology had long since been consolidated as a means of oppression by the ruling class.[90] They concluded that

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[89] A useful deconstruction of the notion of 'development' can be found in Harry Cleaver's "Development or Autonomy." See also Fredric Jameson's discussion of non-synchronicity in his *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 96-98.

[90] Andreas Huyssen observes: "Of course the roots of this autonomous technology tradition reach way back into the past, in the United States as well as in Europe. But it was in the 1920s that technology first

> In Russia, this constructivist romanticism has a deeper meaning and is more thoroughly socially conditioned than in Western Europe. In Russia, Constructivism is, in part, a natural reflex of the machine-oriented offensive of industrialization. For the farmer the experience of electric power, or red-painted tractors of the Kees Company, of turbines, is utterly novel and unheard of. […] In the West, art can no longer fulfill such tasks. Here technology does not have to be detoured through art. (Grosz/Herzfelde, pp. 43-44)

And later in this text:

> The artist of today, if he doesn't want to evade the issues, or become an empty shell, must choose between technology and service in the class war. Either way he must give up 'pure art.' Either he joins the ranks of architects, engineers and ad men whom the industrial powers employ and the world exploits, or he becomes a depicter and critic who critiques the face of our time, becoming a propagandist and defender of revolutionary ideas and of their supporters in the army of the oppressed – those who struggle for their just share of the world's resources, and for a meaningful social order. (Grosz/Herzfelde, pp. 59-60)

Whereas Grosz and Herzelde obviously believed technology and class struggle to be irreconcilable opposites (at least in the West), German communists traveling in the Soviet Union returned to their homeland with the firm conviction that the former be the prime vehicle for the latter. In what follows, I will trace the development of Soviet theories of industrialization and labor, their corresponding ideas in the cultural/literary realm, and the ways in which German communists received, and thereafter imported, them into the German context. The chapter will conclude with an attempt to read Marx and Bloch against the grain of socialist modernization theory – a discussion that will lead us to the

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assumed a major ideological role in legitimizing bourgeois domination, a role which – due to changes in the capitalist economy in the wake of increasing monopolizatioon, taylorization, and state intervention - could no longer be filled by the liberal myth of the "free market" alone. It was precisely this ideological function of the technology cult of the 1920s and its literary manifestations which Brecht attacked." (Huyssen, p. 80)

second part of this study where I will analyze anti-authoritarian socialism and its very different responses to modernity and modernization.

GERMAN WORKERS' DELEGATIONS TO THE SOVIET UNION IN THE GERMAN PRESS

The average German worker during the 1920s was bombarded with contradictory information about the Soviet Union. Between the staunchly pro-Soviet stance of the KPD and the equally firm anti-Soviet position of the SPD, more complex voices were usually not heard. To cite one exception: In a critical response to Otto Bauer, who had claimed that "die schnelle Industrialisierung Russlands erhungert werden muss" (the speedy industrialization of Russia must be paid for by starvation), the economist Judith Grünfeld, herself a proponent of socialism, remarked in an essay in the labor union journal *Die Arbeit* (Labor): "That socialism should pave the way for industrialization, and not vice versa, sounds rather surprising coming from a leading Marxist theoretician."[91] And further: "We are not fighting against capitalist rationalization and its destruction of human values and lives in order to approve of the cruelties in Russia in the name of an alleged socialism and with the blessing of history."[92] Calling the Soviet economy highly irrational, especially with regard to the poor treatment and the lowering of skill-levels of the workforce, Grünfeld's critique, by stark contrast with the bulk of communist industrial Reportage about Russia, calls for focusing on the actual situation of the Russian worker rather than on the statistical output of production.

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[91] "Dass der Sozialismus der Industrialisierung den Weg bereiten soll und nicht umgekehrt, das klingt im Munde eines führenden marxistischen Theoretikers immerhin überraschend."

[92] "Wir kämpfen nicht deswegen dagegen, dass die kapitalistische Rationalisierung Lebenswerte zerstört und Menschenschicksale vernichtet, um die Grausamkeiten in Russland im Namen eines vermeintlichen Sozialismus und mit dem Segen der Geschichte gutzuheissen."

Especially the Social Democratic daily *Der Vorwärts* and the communist papers *Die rote Fahne* and *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* fought hard over the public opinion of Russia among the working-classes. While the KPD publications lacked any critical stance vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, the SPD papers generally condemned the young state as a violent dictatorship hostile to the working masses. The battle came to a climax in 1924 when the *Vorwärts* published a letter written by an anonymous group of Russian workers from the Leningrad Putilov factory in which they complained about oppression in the Soviet Union and protested against the rosy picture that Edo Fimmen, leader of the Dutch Social Democrats, had painted of the situation there.[93] The authenticity of the letter was henceforth questioned by the communist press.[94] As a response, and on the heels of a similar British endeavor (Zarusky, p. 220), the IAH sent three large worker delegations to Russia between 1925 and 1927 with the goal of settling this issue through an "objective" account of the state of affairs in the Soviet Union. Carefully crafted as it was by a Comintern committee with the choreography of the IAH, the German delegation of 1925 was largely composed of social democrats [(30), KPD members (16) and non-partisan workers (12)] in order to dispel any impression of bias. After their six-week stay in the Soviet Union and countless (staged) visits to Soviet model factories, their report with the title *Was sahen 58 deutsche Arbeiter in Russland?* (What Did 58 German Workers See in Russia?, published in 1925 in the *Neuer deutscher Verlag* as part of its *Russlandbibliothek*) was discussed widely (more than 130 000 copies sold out swiftly). The Bolshevists had not missed this major PR opportunity and had impressed the German

[93] See this discussion in Zarusky, pp. 219-220. He also shows that the *Vorwärts* focused its Russia reporting mainly on the deportation of opposition socialists to the camp at Solovetskii and the uprising in Georgia in August of 1924 (pp. 212-214).

[94] See Zarusky, p. 225.

workers with large crowds welcoming them and smoothly operating factories, while at the same time creating the impression of absolute transparency. As a result, the report is positive throughout and belittles or leaves out entirely concerns that oppositional voices had raised with them.

Scholars have certainly been right in pointing out the gaps in the reports. (Zarusky, p. 225) What interests me more than what the report does not account for, however, is what it highlights and celebrates: the work of allegedly successful socialist construction. It is here where the glorification of industrial labor – so ambiguous in the German context – comes through full circle. The question we need to ask is not primarily: how could they not see the workers' opposition and their oppression? Instead, we should ask: how could the solidly reformist social democrats among the workers agree so unabashedly with the organization of work they encountered in Russia? The answer is both simple and paradoxical: they were impressed with what they saw precisely because they were shown what we could call "state capitalism with a human face", i.e. a strictly hierarchical and efficient organization of production with slightly better working and living conditions for the workers.

To mention but a few examples, the report mentions slightly lower wage differences between workers and the so-called "red directors", better hygienic conditions on the shop floor, and more recreational time. Not only does the report not mind that 14-year olds are trained to become more efficient workers using the Taylorist methods of NOT (*nautchnaia organizatsija truda*, scientific organization of labor) – it recommends it. Citing the delegation's visit to the aforementioned Putilov factory in Leningrad, the report states: "14-16-year olds are being trained at factory schools according to the principles of NOT: stronger at the workplace, more deeply immersed in reading, higher

the flag of Lenin!" (Arbeiterdelegation, p. 25)[95] The report also points out that students, after finishing work, are required to exercise parts of their body not used during the work process. Moreover, higher productivity rates and the use of piece rates are highlighted favorably throughout the report. As the delegate Theodor Oberhagen wrote in *Die rote Fahne* in July of 1925, Russia had become a *Arbeiterland*[96]– a polyvalent term he certainly used to characterize the country as one ruled by workers (as opposed to 'ruled by capitalists'); a term, however, which also carries the meaning of a country in which men are solely defined through work. *Die rote Fahne*'s report on the second delegation points out very favorably that sick Russian workers are required to recover over night in special hospitals without interrupting their working routine during daytime. The praise of Soviet sports, which follows this passage, leaves no doubt that the author views sports within the larger context of fitness for work (to work and to work out).

As yet another report on German workers visiting the Leningrad Putilov factory – the true equivalent of Dearborn's Ford factory in the United States in terms of its exemplary symbolic value – shows, the discourse on Russia promotes a paradigm shift from work in the service of capitalists to work as a duty, and obligation, a kind of socialist 'calling.'[97] Not only did this discourse not challenge that, as Max Weber put it, we are forced to work in this calling; it reinforced it.

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[95]"14-16-Jährige werden in der Betriebsschule nach den Prinzipien der NOT unterrichtet: Kräftiger an der Arbeitsstelle, tiefer ins Buch, höher die Fahne Lenins!"

[96] "[…] daß Rußland ein Arbeiterland geworden ist und daß in einigen Jahren Rußland wirtschaftlich mit allem Erfolge in den kapitalistischen Ländern wird konkurrieren können." (*DrF*, July 21, 1925)

[97] In this article, the delegation member Offenhagen is quoted in addressing the Russian workers: "In allen Landern ist die Arbeit eine Qual, denn die Arbeiter wissen, daß sie für die Profitzwecke der Kapitalisten arbeiten. Ihr dagegen arbeitet für euch selbst und haltet die Arbeit für eure Pflicht [...]" (*DrF*, July 17, 1925).

This point can be underscored by looking at the *Rote Fahne's* reporting on Russia beyond the articles on the worker delegations. One paradigmatic article with the title "Die Fabrik als Mittelpunkt des Lebens" (The Factory as Center of Life), published on January 15, 1930, is a good case in point for what we would call today 'corporate culture.' The article celebrates the integration of education and recreation into a model factory composed of the actual production facilities, the "worker university", the club, a political center, etc.: "As soon as work in the workshops is finished, work begins in the club, in reading groups, in the factory councils, in the commissions for production, in various meetings."[98] The author uses the word *Arbeit* (work) for both the production process as well as for the other activities following it.[99] Of course, we could say that he uses the word casually (like a waiter might ask us "Are you still working on your food"), but let us not forget that language often reveals most lucidly how we look at the world. And this is not the only instance in the article in which the language betrays a rather uncomfortable closeness of the Soviet ideal of work with the worst fears of the already industrialized proletariat in Germany. While it was one of the most efficacious ideas of 1920s popular culture and science-fiction that workers would eventually be replaced by automata, that the factory would be able to create its own workers, the article ends on a note not too dissimilar from that scenario by saying that "the factory as a whole has become the true center of all public life insofar as it is not only producing goods for the

[98] "Die Arbeit in den Werkstätten ist zu Ende, es beginnt die Arbeit im Klub, in den Lesezirkeln, in den Räumen des Betriebsrates, in den Produktionskommissionen, in den verschiedenen Sitzungen."

[99] This issue has a long history in neo-Marxism under the designation of the 'labor – play divide.' John Hoberman, in *Sport and Political Ideology*, reconstructs this debate and quotes Lawrence M. Hinman who states that "Marx's position involves an overcoming of the dichotomy between work and play found in capitalist society and a rethinking of the traditional categories in terms of which work and play as forms of human activity are understood. This discussion leads to the question of whether there is any meaningful distinction between work and play in their unalienated forms." (Hoberman, p. 33)

Soviet Union, but has also begun to produce new men."[100] Again, we many object that the author simply has in mind the way in which the collective production process changes human beings. In my opinion, however, we are again – as in the image of the Russian worker as puppet(eer) - faced with the ambiguity of a new consciousness created by collectivity versus the standardization and better control of consciousness created by mass-production. In other words: there is significant overlap between the Soviet model described here and Ford's paternalistic conception as elaborated around the Rouge factory in Dearborn. As is well-known, both models aimed at regulating the workers' whole way of life for the benefit of greater productivity.

INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATION AND INDUSTRIAL CULTURE IN THE SOVIET UNION

Before we discuss literary texts and debates and their relationship to industrial affairs, let us turn to the ways in which industrial organization was really a cultural matter. In other words: we will move now from the realm of industry to the one of culture broadly conceived, and only then zero in on the sphere of literature.

The aforementioned tension between workers' emancipation and regulation becomes clearer once we take a look at what we know about the way in which the Bolshevists organized production after the Revolution. As the above quote by Trotsky demonstrates, they knew exactly what to do with the capitalist assets they inherited from the Czarist regime: to make them their own. The cunning of history for Marxism, namely that the socialist revolution occurred in an economically backward country – seen as an

[100] "[…] in dem die Fabrik als Ganzes zum wirklichen Mittelpunkt des gesamten öffentlichen Lebens wurde, in dem die Fabrik für das Sowjetland nicht nur neue Sachen, sondern auch neue Menschen zu schaffen began." I have translated *schaffen* as 'to produce' for it is used to designate the output of goods ('to create' would have not captured this meaning).

impossibility by orthodox Marxism – and the further aggravation of the economic situation by the civil war, made the Bolsheviks implement a militarization of production aimed at "catching up" with the West. The New Economic Policy (NEP, 1923-1927), which to a considerable extent allowed for capitalist enterprise and the intensified cooperation with Western companies (including Ford) show that the transitional socialist period was by no means a "pure" new mode of production.[101] And the end of the NEP, we need to add, can not be regarded as a "return to communist purity", but rather as a decisive step further towards a tightly planned economy in which the state replaced private business, but subjugated workers to the same or higher productivity pressures.

More important than these allegedly "transitional" elements of Soviet economic policy, however, was the importance given to capitalist production methods such as Taylorism and Fordism, which penetrated the very core of not only the economic organization, but, by extension, of the social formation in its entirety, including aesthetics. In using the conveyor belt as a metaphor for the entire socialist society, Trotsky, who was the chairman of the Committee for Industry and Technology in the mid-1920s, was very much in tune with Lenin's formula of Bolshevism as the sum total of the Soviets and Electrification and Stalin's dictum of Communism as the product of Russian revolutionary spirit and American technology. To quote again from Trotsky:

> 'But what about the monotony of labor, depersonalized and despiritualized by the conveyor?' I am asked […] This is a reactionary path. Socialism and hostility to machinery have never had and will never have anything in common […] There will always be branches of industry in society that demand personal creativity, and those who find their calling in production will make their way to them. What we are concerned with here is the basic type of production in its most important

[101] In fact, the question as to whether socialism counts as a genuine mode of production, or whether it should rather be regarded a purely transitional mode, has always been a bone of contention within Marxism. (See Jameson, 1981, p. 89).

> branches, until at last a fresh chemical and power revolution in technology sweeps aside mechanization as we know it today. (Trotsky, p. 244)

Trotsky engages here in an interesting thought experiment: the ills created by technology will eventually be healed by more and more advanced technology. By claiming the brotherhood of socialism and machinery – indeed, by visualizing socialism *as* one grand machinery – Trotsky simply disregards technology's psycho-social applications. If there should be some problems with technology, the logic went, they would be only temporary ones on the road to the future.

But the official party-line regarding the strictly hierarchical organization of production was not met with unanimous approval. Alexandra Kollontai objected - already during the early stages of the reorganization of industry after the revolution - that to deny workers to handle production themselves and trust specialists is "to jump off the rails of scientific Marxist thought." (Kollontai, p. 7) Insisting again and again on the self-activity of the workers, Kollontai was acutely aware of the impossibility of creating new ways of being and of social organization while simply transplanting capitalist production methods onto Russian soil. Embracing, like Rühle, council communism, she sought to "ensure freedom for the manifestation of creative class abilities, not restricted and crippled by the bureaucratic machine which is saturated with the spirit of routine of the bourgeois capitalist system of production and control." (Kollontai, p. 17)

In his 1985 study *Die Arbeiterklasse als Maschine* (The Working Class as Machine), which was an important inspiration for this chapter, social historian Walter Süß advances the thesis that industrial organization during the early Soviet Union was a major factor in paving the way for Stalinism – a thesis we can find backed up in much of

the recent scholarship on Soviet Russia during that period.[102] Rightly arguing that the structural contribution of industrialization in the development of Stalinism had been neglected previously, he gathers impressive evidence for the correlation of structures of political power on one hand, and industrial relations and methods of production on the other. Fordism, in this view, can be viewed as the appropriate expression of Stalinism in the realm of the organization of production. (Süß, p. xiii) Part and parcel of this argument is the overwhelming evidence of the dramatic decrease of skilled labor throughout the 1920s which, politically, led to the weakening of the social status of workers vis-à-vis the managerial and bureaucratic elite. (Süβ, pp. 18-19, 69) As a rule of thumb in labor history, lower skill levels are taken to mean smaller bargaining power for workers, as they can be more easily replaced (by machines as well as other workers). As a result of this process, the traditionally all-rounded and task-oriented[103] approach to work of the Russian workforce gave way to an ever-increasing split between planning and execution, between a managerial elite of engineers and bureaucrats and a large army of largely unskilled workers. While not entirely unquestioned among Soviet leaders, and met with

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[102] See, for example, the anthologies *Russia in the Era of NEP – Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), particularly the articles by William G. Rosenberg, Mark von Hagen, and Hiroaki Kuromiya, and *Social Dimensions of Soviet Industrialization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), particularly the contributions by Lewis H. Siegelbaum, Hiroaki Kuromiya, and David Shearer.

[103] For the cultural implication of the shift from task-orientation (with no clear distinction between 'work' and 'life') to industrial work discipline (in which time is not 'passed' but 'spent'), see E.P. Thompson's seminal *Customs in Common*, especially the chapter "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism" (pp. 352-403). There, he states: "Mature industrial societies of all varieties are marked by time-thrift and by a clear demarcation between 'work' and 'life'. But, having taken the problem so far, we may be permitted to moralise a little, in the eighteenth-century manner, ourselves. The point at issue is not that of the 'standard-of-living'. If the theorists of growth wish us to say so, then we may agree that the older popular culture was in many ways otiose, intellectually vacant, devoid of quickening, and plain bloody poor. Without time-discipline we could not have the insistent energies of industrial man; and whether this discipline comes in the forms of Methodism, or of Stalinism, or of nationalism, it will come to the developing world." (Thompson, pp. 398-399)

considerable resistance from workers themselves, the drive toward Taylorism was also responsible for the dissolution of the so-called labor *artels*, labor collectives that "embodied a collectivist principle of social organization that was congenial to the Bolsheviks as well." (Kuromiya, p. 72) Ensuring a cooperative to labor through a rotation system among its members along with equal wages, the *artel* nevertheless came to be seen as an obstacle to a fully streamlined and controllable organization of labor. In the late Marx's writings about Russia, by contrast, the artel form had met with considerable approval.[104] Rotermundt and Schmiederer have made the same point specifically for NEP Russia: "The import of production plants is accompanied by capitalist organization of factories and the work process, wage systems, technicians, methods of management, etc. The productivity of living labor becomes subject to the capitalist mode of production." (Rotermundt/Schmiederer, p. 127)[105]

And as much it is a mistake to treat issues of political power and industrial organization as separate issues, it is equally important not to separate the latter from larger cultural matters. To the extent that the radical re-structuring of the workforce created a large amount of discontent, it was essential to create at least the semblance of it being deeply anchored in the cultural aspirations of the Russian workers. In other words, Bolshevism aimed at the people's consent to industrialization and collectivization. And more recent scholarship has successfully accounted for this aspect: after decades of dominance of theories of totalitarianism with their focus on the repressive aspects of power, scholars have more recently employed Gramsci's concept of hegemony, as well as

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[104] See the discussion of Marx' late writings about Russia at the end of this chapter.

[105] "Mit dem Import von Produktionsanlagen werden auch kapitalistische Betriebs- und Arbeitsorganisation, Lohnsysteme, Techniker, Managementmethoden usw. importiert. Die Produktivkraft der lebendigen Arbeit wird den Bedingungen unterworfen, die die kapitalistische Produktionsweise setzt."

Foucault's concept of power, both of which emphasize the productive aspects of control (e.g. the movement from surveillance to self-monitoring, and from punishment to self-discipline). For example, Stephen Kotkin, in his study *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (1997), has been able to convincingly demonstrate how the citizenry of Magnitogorsk participated in myriad ways in the "forced industrialization", how Stalinism did not simply rule by force (that too, of course), but through the promise and practice of a whole new civilization:

> In the 1930s, the people of the USSR were engaged in a grand historical endeavor called building socialism. This violent upheaval, which began with the suppression of capitalism, amounted to a collective search for socialism in housing, urban form, popular culture, the economy, management, population migration, social structure, politics, values, and just about everything else one could think of, from styles of dress to modes of reasoning. (Kotkin, p. 355)

Industrial management, in this view, is closely related to a whole host of aspects of everyday life (the Russian *byt*), rather than solely an economic affair.

Sticking with industrial management and its cultural implications for our own purposes, we can find, for example, in the "struggle over time" (*borba za vrem'ia*) an important instance of how industrial requirements aimed at changing the entire fabric of everyday life in the Soviet Union. Through the founding of the so-called "time league" in 1923, the still mostly task-oriented, cyclical understanding of time of the Russian population was to be replaced with a linear conception in tune with the efficiency requirements of industrial life. With about 25 000 members in 1924, the time league initially enjoyed considerably broad appeal in instituting time management during and after work (members were asked to carry so-called "chrono-cards" at all times).

Characterizing free time solely in terms of recreation of labor power, the league's chairman P.M. Kerentsev writes:

> The time league is an organization in the fight against squandering the work-time of society […] The time league is a collective means of propaganda for introducing Americanism in the best sense of the word: our work is our life! (*Vrem'ia* 1923/1, p. 64)

Another major player in the effort to introduce Western production technology and corresponding models of work was the Central Institute of Labor (CIT), a radical proponent of a full-fledged rationalization of labor (and the disputes between the time league and CIT, from my perspective, seem insignificant given the philosophy their shared). Interestingly enough, as its chairman served Alexei Gastev, like Kerentsev known as part of the Proletkul't, and also as a poet and part of the *Kutsnitsa* ("Smithy") group. Gastev was an important forerunner of what he called "machinic" culture and had expressed since the early 1910s in poetry that has itself aptly been described as "Taylorized." (Johannson, p. 98) After his return from exile, during which he became acquainted with time and motion studies, he started writing manuals such as his "Kak nado rabotat" (How one must work, figure 3) as chairman of CIT.

Against initial reservations from the Bolshevist leadership, his views would eventually become the official party line until the institute was dissolved in the mid 1930s, with Gastev meeting an untimely end in the Gulag in 1938. The radical nature of his ideas about work can be seen in the following quote:

> The new age demands a generation with tempered nerves, strong physiques and unreflective agility. To do this we must develop a system of precise exercises. The rabbits of Durov's clowns are more developed in this sense than contemporary man. […] We must begin to work with systematized training not at

> the age of 14 or 16, as is presently permitted by the law, but perhaps at the age of 2, at least by organizing special systems of games based on this principle.[106]

From here, we can make a rather effortless transition to culture in the more narrow sense of the term. Similar to the rabbits of Durov's clowns, whose training on the circus stage was based on a system of rewards and who in turn inspired Pavlov's behaviorist experiments, the Soviet director Meier'hold trained his actors according to the principles of "biomechanics." In his view, acting was to be aligned with Taylorist production. In film, directors such as Dziga Vertov not only chose industrial subjects for films like the industrial symphony *Enthusiasm* (Enthusiasm: Symphonie of the Donbass), they also emphasized the medium's technological and industrial provenance – with 'montage', a term taken from industrial vocabulary, being regarded as its main principle. In the fine arts, the 1920s saw a widespread denigration of "easel art" in favor of photographic technique until Stalin's conservative tastes would gain the upper hand. And in literature, the influence of these more industrial media was expressed in theories such as Tret'iakov's in which the conveyor belt was proposed as a model for narrative construction (e.g. in his essay "Biografia Veshi" (The Biography of the Thing) where he suggested to use the conveyor principle as the main tectonic principle of the new productivist aesthetics. The narrative, he argued, should track the development of assembly-line produced products rather than the development of human characters. The latter, Tretiakov believed, would enter into the narrative upon coming into contact with the product and they would do so in certain social functions rather than as individual characters.

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[106] quoted in Johannson, p. 104.

In the scholarship about the left avant-garde, even when as critical and insightful as David Bathrick's, a clear separation between its productivism and the productive imperatives of Leninism/Stalinism is maintained.[107] At least with respect to the issue of work, however, it seems highly questionable to uphold such a clear-cut distinction. Rather, we could join Boris Groys' in his recent intervention which, albeit problematic in its tendency to make sweeping generalizations, stresses the continuity between the avant-garde and Stalinism, especially with regard to assumptions about the author as producer and the producer as author. Groys maintains that "by casting the artist, the proletariat, the party, the leader in the role of demiurge, they [the avant-gardes] provide for their natural integration into world mythology" (Groys, p. 117) and views Stalinism as the fulfillment (rather than the negation) of the avantgarde's dreams. (Groys, p. 113) German communist authors traveling the Soviet Union at the time, I believe, bear out this view by embracing both the industrial culture they encountered and the artistic expressions emulating them.

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[107] Bathrick defines the productivists' agenda as follows: "Indeed, by recasting artistic creaticity within the categories of labor power and material production, the LEF theorists strove for a materialist aesthetic which challenged the premises of bourgeois, but also implicitly of Leninist, aesthetics. What links bourgeois and Leninist notions of consciousness and art is an emphasis upon an ontology of knowledge, upon consciousness as a secondary, reflected, and passive repository for finished "products" of thought. The Futurists questioned this by seeking to break with what Arvatov pejoratively referred to as "easel art" (art as supplementation of a disharminozed, i.e. unorganized reality) and by establishing a threefold relationship to the forces of production at large: (1) as an activity which appropriated the physical materials and organizational principles of the industrialization of everyday life – film, radio, the other mechanical media; (2) as an activity which functioned within and dissolved the production of useful objects, the design of objects and cities, the aesthetics of functionalism, etc.; (3) as an activity which availed itself of the formative principles of industrial and technological modes of production – montage, etc." (Bathrick, pp. 113-114)

TRAVELING THROUGH MODES OF PRODUCTION – GERMAN COMMUNIST WRITERS ON SOVIET INDUSTRIALIZATION

How did German communist writers traveling the Soviet Union respond to Soviet industrialization and its corresponding ideas in the cultural realm? In answering this question, we need to shift our focus away from the anonymous worker correspondents we discussed in the previous chapter. Since not too many non-professional authors had the chance to travel to the "promised land" of socialism, let us focus on some of the better-known communist authors at the time.

Like the Putilov factory, CIT facilities would become popular travel destinations for German left-wingers at the time. While Ernst Toller, who, as author of the drama *Die Maschinenstürmer* (The Luddites) of 1922, was himself interested in issues of labor and technology, showed some reservations about Gastev's approach from a humanist perspective[108], Egon Erwin Kisch was less cautious. While Kisch, in his *Zaren, Popen, Bolschewiken* (Czars, Popes, Bolsheviks) of 1927, partly acknowledged the often contradictory realities of Soviet production (e.g. in his account of the *Krasnii Treugolnik* factory), he forgets his reservations entirely in a Reportage called "Universität für Fabrikarbeit" (University of Factory Work). This piece describes in mercilessly Taylorized prose the most improbable Taylorization of production training to be found anywhere. It is worthwhile to quote several passages at length:

> The signal shrills, the students come marching into the room like athletes, lined up in pairs [...] they stand on sixteen pedestals, which can be raised or lowered

[108] Toller remarked upon his visit to the Central Institute in 1926: "I am starting to feel unconmfortable. That is supposed to be the goal: Mechanization of man, the suppression of all creative inside him? I talk about my fears. Gastev smiles. "Through our research, we hope to achieve that workers will take only two to three hours for tasks that used to take them eight." My translation. The original reads: "Mir wird beklommen zumute. Das soll das Ziel sein: Mechanisierung des Menschen, Ertötung all dessen, was als Schöpferisches in ihm lebt? Ich spreche über meine Befürchtungen. Gastev lächelt. 'Wir hoffen durch unsere Forschungen zu erreichen, dass ein Arbeiter, der früher für einen bestimmten Zweck acht Stunden brauchte, in Zukunft nur noch zwei bis drei Stunden brauchen wird." (quoted in Johannson, p. 109)

> depending on each student's height, their bodies are strapped very tightly, so that they can lean neither forward nor backward, the chairs are positioned half a meter behind them, the work schedule is on the left, on the right is a table on which tools are meticulously arranged, the tools have indentations for the ten fingers, lathe, wheels, and belt are still covered at this point in order not to distract the students from their immediate tasks […] Even the commands are given automatically, a moving strip of celluloid with punch holes sets off the signals – the automatic professor. (Kisch, 1977, p. 58)[109]

Kisch's vocabulary vacillates between sports (*wie Turner* [like athletes]) and the military (*marschieren* [march], *Kommandos* [commands]) and there is not a single distancing commentary to be found in the entire piece (the positive ending makes quite clear that the "objective" distance is not a marker of irony). The division of labor is here taken further toward a division of each motion into microscopic parts: "The striking of the chisel, appearing to the layman as one continuous motion, has been recognized through motion-studies to be the sum total of partial motions. Divided up, they can be taught much more successfully." (Kisch, 1977, p. 61)[110] Even the students' grades are

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[109] "Das Signal schrillt, die Schüler marschieren wie Turner ein, in Zweierreihen [...] sie stellen sich auf sechzehn Postamente, die nach der Größe des einzelnen gehoben oder gesenkt werden können, für Kopf und Füße sind Schablonen da, ihren Körper schnallen sie fest, so daß er sich weder vorneigen noch zurücklehnen kann, der Stuhl steht einen halben Meter hinter jedem, der Arbeitsplan liegt linker Hand, das Handwerkszeug rechts an markierten Stellen des Tisches, für die zehn Finger sind Einbuchtungen auf dem Werkzeug und dem zu behandelnden Eisenstück, Apparatur der Drehbank, Räder und Treibriemen bleiben vorerst verdeckt, damit der Schüler von seiner Aufgabe nicht abgelenkt werde. [...] Auch die Kommandos werden maschinell gegeben, ein sich abrollender Zelluloidstreifen, durchlöchert, löst die Kontakte der Signale aus – der Automatische Professor." The fact that passages like this one have been overlooked by scholarship so far must have to do with ideological blinders: for scholars in the FRG interested in purging the image of Kisch from communism (Henri Nannen went as far as to endow a Kisch-prize for *Tendenzlosigkeit* (impartiality), see Patka, p. 21), the celebration of Soviet production was naturally disregarded. For Marxists during the 70s and 80s, on the other hand, Kisch's embrace of Stalinism would have been equally embarrassing.

[110] "[d]er Meißelschlag, der sich dem Laien als eine einzige Bewegung darstellt, ist durch zeitlupenartige Beobachtung als Summe von Teilbewegungen erkannt worden, und diese sind es, die einzeln in vollkommenerer Weise gelehrt werden."

transmitted in the form of statistics, since all of the workers' motions are being registered electrically in another room – a surveillance measure of which the students are not aware.

Although the rationalization process described here is hardly different from the same taking place in the West at the same time, Kisch, in his defense of the Soviet Union, feels often compelled to draw distinctions, even if those provide little explanations, as in the following passage:

> The task to rationalize work was undertaken by Aleksei Gastev, a poet who gave up poetry at that time […] With the help of the methodology of American work shops, he managed to incorporate some elements of Taylorism – elements which kill the human being in the worker over there – into his system to the benefit of the worker. (Kisch, 1977, p. 60)[111]

Kisch does not explain in what way Taylorism benefits the Soviet worker during the New Economic Policy. In fact, the understatement "einige Handgriffe des Taylorismus" betrays an apologetic attitude in Kisch who either does not know or does not want to admit that Gastev, as we have seen, was indeed a radical proponent of a full-fledged rationalization of labor. Roughly a decade earlier, in 1914, Lenin had still called Taylorism the "enslavement of man by the machine." Let me quote a passage from his Modern Times-like depiction of production training because his words will reappear in Kisch almost word by word.

> An electric lamp was attached to a worker's arm, the worker's movements were photographed and the movements of the lamp studied. Certain movements were found to be to "superfluous" and the worker was made to avoid them, i.e., to work more intensively, without losing a second for rest. (Lenin, p. 153)

[111]"Der Aufgabe, die Arbeit zu rationalisieren, unterzog sich Alexej Gastew, ein Lyriker, der um diese Zeit der Poesie entsagte […] Um die Methodik amerikanischer Werkstätten bereichert, brachte er es fertig, einige Handgriffe des Taylorismus, die drüben in ihrer lebenslänglichen alleinigen Anwendung den Menschen im Arbeiter vernichten, zugunsten des Arbeiters seinem System einzufügen."

Already in 1926, Kisch had published several pieces about Russia in the *Das Neue Russland* (The New Russia), the journal of the *Gesellschaft der Freunde des Neuen Russland* (Society of Friends of the New Russia). This society was not associated with any political party and attracted a wide range of intellectuals, scientists, and artists across the political spectrum. It was their explicit goal to counter the very powerful anti-Soviet propaganda and confront the building of a new socialist society in Russia without prejudice. The *Gesellschaft* invited prominent Russian speakers such as Maiakovsky (1924), Lunacharsky (1926) and Tret'iakov (1931) to Berlin, and we know that Kisch attended most of these lectures and discussions even before he joined the society in 1926. Moreover, *Das Neue Russland* paid close attention to the economic and technological development in the Soviet Union, printing essays about worker education and factory hygiene side by side with Kisch's more literary Reportagen. The work of the *Gesellschaft der Freunde des Neuen Russland*, we should assume, was the backdrop for Kisch's writings about the Soviet Union from the mid-1920s.

Consistent with the ideological slant of the Gesellschaft, most of the Reportagen assembled in *Zaren, Popen, Bolschewiken* explicitly defend the industrial progress made against bourgeois propaganda in the West, though not completely uncritically. Kisch's narrative voice now largely relies on statistics, and the only slippage into the mythological view of machines in the Putilow factory ends in self-criticism:

> One knows this magic against which all arts come up short, one has spent hours to watch it and cannot look away ...But did I come from Central Europe here to the Finish bay to succumb once again to the magic of iron? (Kisch, 1977, p. 75)[112]

[112] "Man kennt diesen Zauber, an dem alle Künste scheitern, man hat schon Stunden damit verbracht, ihm zuzusehen, und kann den Blick nicht wenden …Kam man jedoch von Mitteleuropa hierher an den Finnischen Meerbusen, neuerlich der Magie des Eisens zu unterliegen?"

The answer is negative, of course, and Kisch proceeds more soberly in listing average working hours, the 17 wage categories, etc. Again, the most interesting moments in the book regarding industrial life are the ones that concern standardized labor. Consistent with Trotsky's view of the conveyor belt, Kisch defends the heavily standardized production at the factory "Krasnii Treugolnik":

> Four-thousand female workers are standing in the long manufacturing facilities, their red headscarfs rocking back and forth like balloons, their movements roaring with numbing monotony according to the rhythm of the machines, although the women perform not only one single motion, but a shoemakers' whole range of tasks. (Kisch, 1977, p. 28, italicized in the original)[113]

On one hand, the reporter points out the mechanized rhythm of production – and the cheerful metaphor of the balloons seems to be ironic at best – on the other hand, he defends the production method by stressing the workers' relationship to the whole product of their labor. This half-hearted and flawed comparison of the mass production of rubber boots with the work of a shoemaker is certainly aimed at building a bridge between industrial and artisanal labor.[114]

This passage needs to be cross-read with another one in this very same Reportage, where Kisch is highly critical of the rather stark wage differences between the managerial

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[113] "In den langen Sälen der Konfektion stehen viertausend Arbeiterinnen, die roten Kopftücher schaukeln im Raum wie Kinderballons, Bewegungen dröhnen mit unpersönlicher Regelmäβigkeit im Hacketakt einer Maschine, obwohl die Frauen nicht etwa bloβ *einen* Handgriff zu tun haben, sondern eines Schusters ganze Arbeit."

[114] Artisanal labor, however, came under attack for not being in tune with the modern age. For example, the 'German model' of the Facharbeiter, rooted in the guilds, was denigrated at the expense of the 'American model', i.e. Taylorism and Fordism. (Süß, p. 230) Arvatov refused the parallel between the artist and the artisan by arguing that handicraft was a regressive mode of production. (Arvatov, p. 58) Similarly, Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, in his essay on Americanism and Fordism, stated that the "link between art and labor is now destroyed." (Gramsci, p. 303)

and technical elite on one side, and the "regular" workers on the other. Pointing out that workers are paid by piece rate even under socialism, he writes:

> 'Piece work – squeeze work', this rhymes even while not working for capitalists – even while having sanatoriums, benefits for pregnancy and nurse, health care and day care for children, even while having clubs, theaters, cinema, music and libraries near and for free – the piece worker would anyhow become emotionally and physically stunted without long periods of recreation. (Kisch, 1977, pp. 34-35)[115]

My point here is that Kisch is well aware of the crippling and stultifying nature of the labor process itself, a fact which has to be compensated for by prolonged recreation. The problem here is that this very same rift between labor and recreation is, according to Marxism, always already an effect of reification and, in last consequence, the precondition for the compartmentalization of culture and aesthetics as distinct from the working experience.[116] Since Kisch himself was not a worker, but an observer, we cannot – as in the case of the worker correspondents – ask about the relationship between the author's working experience and the aesthetics of the text. We must, however, still inquire about the ways in which the productivist ethos outlined above found expression on the formal level – an issue that was ferociously debated at the time in the search for a new proletarian literature.

Despite Kisch's own appearance in his text, the narrative voice clearly takes a backseat behind the material realities it encounters. Again and again in the writings about

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[115] "'Akkordarbeit – Mordarbeit', das reimt sich, auch wenn man nicht für einen Patron arbeitet – auch wenn man Sanatorien, Benefizien für Schwangerschaft und Nährmutter, unentgeltliche Krankheitsbehandlung und Kindererziehung, auch wenn man Klub, Theater, Radio, Kino, Musik und Leibbibliotheken nahe und gratis hat, müβte der Akkordarbeiter ohne ausgiebigen Erholungsurlaub über kurz oder land geistig und körperlich verkümmern."

[116] The most prominent branch of neo-Marxism to have taken up this issue were the Situationists with Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* as its best-known articulation.

the Soviet Union at the time, one has the impression that the authors would have considered it a sacrilege to add anything subjective to this objectively unfolding success story. To be sure, the dichotomy between fact and fiction which many a study of reportage sought to establish (Siegel, Geissler) breaks down once we consider that the plot, which supposedly lacks in the text, has simply shifted to the extra-textual one of "socialist construction" which, in return, provides the blueprint and grand narrative of the text itself. Therefore, it seems to me a conceptual mistake to take Lukács' critique as main reference, as he was highly critical of modernist features such as montage, 'de-familiarization', etc. – in one word: of formalism. This critique misses the point when applied to the examples cited here, in which we do not see instances of de-familiarization, but, on the contrary, of 're-familiarization' (Hayden White's term[117]). Over against Lukács' critique of reportage, which chastised it for its lack of composition/portrayal, for its inability to grasp and render totality, Walter Benjamin stressed Reportage's tendency to narrativize too much (rather than not enough). In a fragment from 1930/1931, at the same time Lukács was writing his essays on reportage in *Die Linkskurve*, Benjamin writes:

> It is high time to acknowledge that the fashionable appeal to "facts" is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it is undoubtedly hostile to fictions removed from reality – to belles lettres, in short. On the other hand, it attacks theory. Experience proves this. Never has a generation of young writers been less interested in the theoretical legitimation of its activities than the generation that exists today. (Benjamin 2002, 417)

[117] According to White, 're-familiarization' is a discursive strategy that is central to the understanding of narrative and, by extension, historiography. According to White, even 'factual' discursive writing makes use of strategies of *emplotment* to make stories out of mere chronicles, a definition that makes equal sense when applied to the journalistic travel writing under scrutiny here. (White, p. 68)

In his numerous polemical articles on New Objectivity and journalism, Benjamin tried to defend theoretical "stance" (*Haltung*) against the onrush of the immediacy of "information". But where does this stance come from? How does one acquire it? Benjamin's answer in his "Moscow" (1927) aptly illuminates the point I am trying to make with regard to German communist discourse about Russia: namely that is seeks to emulate an already transparent truth (classless society, etc.) ready to see for everybody actually being there, with the precondition of buying into the grand narrative of the necessary stages of modes of production. From Moscow, Benjamin observes:

> In Russia above all, you can see only if you have already decided. At the turning point in historical events that is indicated, if not constituted, by the fact of "Soviet Russia," the question at issue is not which reality is better or which has greater potential. It is only: Which reality is inwardly convergent with truth? Which truth is inwardly preparing itself to converge with the real? Only he who clearly answers these questions is "objective." Not toward his contemporaries (which is unimportant) but toward events (which is decisive). Only he who, by decision, has made his dialectical peace with the world can grasp the concrete. But someone who wishes to decide "on the basis of facts" will find no basis in the facts. (Benjamin, 2002, p. 22)

Once you have decided that a given reality is "inwardly convergent with truth", once the veil of commodity fetishism has been lifted and access is granted to "the real", to "the concrete", social antagonisms and problems of literary theory disappear. Literature, then, only needs to herald. Whatever the state of the Soviet economy and its division of labor, it could be justified.

In surveying a large number of communist travel writings from the Soviet Union from the 1920s and early 1930s, which GDR scholarship has very thoroughly collected in volumes with melodious titles such as *Die Zeit trägt einen roten Stern* (The Times are Carrying a Red Star, 1959) and *Licht des großen Oktober* (Light of the Great October, 1967), I have found very little evidence of a concern with changing the patterns of work

which were clearly shared by capitalist and socialist industrial organization. Exceptionally, Arthur Holitscher, in "Drei Monate in Sowjet-Rußland" (Three Months in Soviet Russia, 1921), favorably cites an incident in which state officials, members of the intelligentsia, and workers were all together recruited for hard manual labor. Having himself participated in this endeavor, he writes:

> My legs and arms were hurting, but my heart was content. I wished…how much I wished there was a force which made all of us young and old mental workers in Germany, America, in the whole world do hard, physical labor once a week with our comrades. For the sake of work, the indivisible work of hand and head, for the sake of good comradeship, for the idea of community and future! Let us clear away the hardened mud with hard cuts of the spade! (Holitscher, p. 33)[118]

Such attempts to de-differentiate social strata, however, were not to play any significant role in the years to come. And in any event, Holitscher's account has more in common with the apologetics of industrial labor than not, as "hard work" still remains the only option for – pun intended – communist society to "work". Communist discourse on work at the time, regardless of its diversity, seems to have always ended up in this same place: labor is the source of all wealth, it must hence be enforced and imposed – "they who will not work may not eat", the passage from St. Paul that ironically ended up in Stalin's Soviet constitution of 1936.

Especially by around 1930, in texts such as Anna Seghers' "Arbeit am ersten Fünfjahrplan" (Working on the first Five-year Plan, 1930) and Alexander Abusch's "Das

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[118] "Beine und Arme taten mir weh, mein Herz aber war froh. Ich wünschte … ich wünschte, ein Zwang käme irgendwoher, und jeder von uns alten und jungen geistigen Arbeitern in Deutschland, Amerika, der ganzen Welt müßte einmal in der Woche mit Kameraden nützliche und harte körperliche Arbeit leisten. Um der Arbeit willen der einen unteilbaren Arbeit der Hand und des Kopfes willen, der guten, lächelnden Kameradschaft willen, für die Idee der Gemeinschaft und der Zukunft verhärteten Schlamm aus dem Weg räumen mit harten Spatenstichen."

Siegeslied von 1930" (The Victory Song of 1930, 1930), this mentality is all-pervasive. In these accounts, work has lost all concreteness despite Segher's claim that people need to be viewed in their specific processes of production. (Seghers, p. 99) Against this claim, she cites a Russian worker saying that what he does is not regular work (*gewöhnliche Arbeit*), but work on the historical mission for the Five-year plan. (Seghers, p. 100) Seghers' text itself, one could argue, partakes of this work and seeks to disseminate it. Furthermore, as she believes the world she sees to be fully transparent – with the opaqueness of commodity relations finally gone – the author is freed from the necessities of *Gestaltung* (composition, portrayal); all the text needs to do is be a transmitter of reality, evidence of things seen and quotation of voices heard. In other words: a society full of presences has no need of re-presentations.

Abusch's *Victory Song*, saturated as it is with militaristic terminology, deserves closer inspection as a genre hybrid. In keeping with the dominant trend in proletarian literature to draw on social "facts" and personal experience (*Die lebendige Wirklichkeit ist stärker als jede Vorstellung, die man aus dem Studium der Literatur gewinnt* [Abusch, p. 110]), Abusch organizes the piece in segments whose titles lend them the local and temporal specificity (like *Im Ural, Ende November 1930*) of an eyewitness account. At the same time, however, he rightly calls it a hymn (*Siegeslied*) as its emphatic quality clearly goes way beyond factual reporting. The song's plot is one of war: socialist attack (*sozialistischer Angriff*) against backwardness (*Rückständigkeit*) on the grounds of the steel-like Urals (*stahlharter Ural*), fought by armies and shock brigades of neophyte workers (*Armeen neuer Arbeiter*) who fearlessly (*todesmutig*) conquer nature (*sie besiegten die Natur*). Despite the conveyor and the speed of production he claims to exceed American levels at Stalingrad tractor plant, he sees nothing but joy of work (*Hier*

ist wahrhaft Freude an der Arbeit). In narrating this industrial drama unfolding in the Soviet East, Abusch is unable to stick with the sober tone of reportage. In one possible and highly problematic actualization of the "author as producer" model which Benjamin, following Tret'iakov, proposed in 1934, Abusch is rather a participant in socialist construction by means of his pen.

FLYING OVER THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN: EGON ERWIN KISCH IN CENTRAL ASIA

By the time of his return to the Soviet Union two years after his first trip, Egon Erwin Kisch had recovered from the nightmare of Fordism which, in the meantime, he had experienced in the United States and the Ford factories, to once again celebrate industrial growth, as embodied in Stalin's gigantic five-year plan, in his book *Asien, gründlich verändert* (Changing Asia) of 1932. Already before he departed for Russian in 1930, he wrote in the newspaper *Welt am Abend*: "Once you realize that the five-year plan is the most significant event of our time you will have to admit that a work of art can only be called significant when it puts itself in the service of this event."[119] The Five-year Plan was intended to finally do away with the remnants of the old order in the world of labor and clearly sharpened the rift between a small elite of specialists and an ever-increasing number of poorly trained or entirely unskilled workers (mostly organized in so-called 'shock brigades'). It also brought about a dramatic decrease in wages, which was, however, counter-balanced with a renewed enthusiasm about the fresh start and growing productivity among the workers. Moreover, the severe economic crisis of the depression period in the West just seemed to have proven the superiority of the socialist

[119] "Wenn man sich klar darüber ist, daβ das gröβte Ereignis überhaupt der Fünfjahrplan ist, so kann nur ein Kunstwerk als das bedeutendste bezeichnet werden, das im Dienste des Fünfjahrplans steht." (quoted in Schütz, p. 122)

economy over its capitalist rival. This, in short, was the situation in which Kisch left Germany for the Asian part of the Soviet Union as part of a brigade of international writers (he was "embedded," to use a current term), a trip that would lead him all the way to the Afghan border.

Shortly before departing to the Soviet Union in March of 1931, the "racing reporter" (*der rasende Reporter*, as Kisch was known) got himself "up to speed." He went to the Berlin *Mercedes-Palast* to attend a party that was organized by the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* (the Workers Illustrated Newspaper) and featured the motto *D-Zug Berlin-Moskau* (fast-train Berlin-Moscow). Accordingly, tropes of speed dominate Kisch's subsequent writing about traveling the Soviet Union – the reportage collection *Asien, gründlich verändert* of 1932. However, Kisch employs the mode of transportation in the service of a much more fundamental, Marxist temporal order (that of the mode of production) which renders spatial experience/the experience of locality, largely irrelevant. This dominance of temporal over spatial concern can be found in many accounts of the "Marxist tourists" to the Soviet Union at the time.

Significantly, Kisch begins his book by reporting from an airplane "through the wings of a propeller" (so the title of the First Chapter). As in the rather well-known Kisch portrait by the experimental photographer Otto Umbehr, in which his body is replaced by various machines (typewriter, camera, airplane, etc., see illustration 3), the reporter seems to become one with technology. He writes:

> In our ears the propeller is still whirring, in our joints the wheels are revolving […] in our brain the body and wings of the dragon-fly are still rushing through space – the airplane is at rest, but its dynamic force has been communicated to its passengers. (Kisch, 1935, p. 10)

It is clear that the author sees himself and his writing, whose actuality and authenticity are underlined by the use of newspaper excerpts, at the cutting edge of history. This experience of speed swiftly links up with the temporal order of dynamism and progress in Russia. Kisch writes about his fellow travelers whom he met during a stop-over:

> An engineer who fourteen years ago could not read or write, and five years ago was a humble employee on a work-bench, is waiting for the plane which is to carry him to the greatest asbestos plant in the Ural […] Three colleagues from the Pravda are flying to Rostov, Tiflis, and Kharkov with matrices; from today on, their paper will be printed there from the same matrices used in Moscow for the morning edition. (Kisch, 1935, pp. 3-4)

We can distinguish between two temporal orders here, one synchronic and one diachronic. As a traveling journalist, he is quick to point out that technology enables his Russian colleagues to publish their paper simultaneously in the most distant parts of the country. The vastness of the Soviet empire can be conquered by speed. At the same time, and even more importantly, Kisch contrasts his upbeat view with the former backwardness of the country with its provincialism and high level of illiteracy. In traveling to central Asia rather than to Leningrad, Moscow, or to rapidly industrializing centers like Magnitostroi or the Donbass region, "backwardness" becomes indeed the governing concern of Kisch's account, and the temporality of the Five-year plan its main leitmotif. The extreme non-synchronicity of Soviet economy and culture, its uneven development, presents Kisch with a variety of modes of production, from nomadic to industrial pockets, linked to static/cyclical and accelerated/progressive time: "When the little excrescence of grass is used up, the house will be folded up and the inhabitants will wander on. This has been going on for a hundred years. A thousand." And then again:

"Everywhere there are signs of construction: bridges, railroad stations, apartment buildings, silos, smokestacks; we are flying over the Five Year-Plan." (Kisch, 1935, p. 6)

This commercial-like structure of "before" and "after" that Kisch employs for his texts (one chapter features alternating paragraphs describing past and present/future, the last chapter actually carries the title "Past, Present, and Future") becomes highly problematic in its zeal to root out anything in the way of a socialist and secularized industrial society – resulting, among other things, in a radical anti-Muslim stance. Unlike Marx, who, in his letters in the early 1880s, is careful not to call for a full-fledged industrialization of Russia and saw the communist future spring from the village community (*mir*) (and he did not even refer to central Asia), Kisch tends to equate social with industrial and technological progress. In the reportage about the making of the city of Stalinabad, the new capital of Tajikistan, Kisch explicitly argues against those on the Weimar left who actually saw better prospects for communism in the backward Orient than in the industrialized West (mainly anarcho-syndicalists). After having listed the city's progress since 1925, when the autonomous republic of Tajikistan was set up as a unit within the Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan, Kisch concludes:

> Centuries have been skipped. Without passing through capitalism, without having learned to know exploitation through machinery, straight from the yoke of medieval feudalism, the land enters upon the era of constructive socialism, from individual to collective enterprise. (Kisch, 1935, pp. 90-91)

Or, at another point:

> The Revolution; bandit raids; smugglers and refugees; the advent of machinery; collectivization; Marx and Lenin – the inhabitants of this border State on the boundary of the English colony have experienced more in their lifetime than their ancestors in a thousand years. (Kisch, 1935, pp. 236-237)

We see in these passages the linear, progressive conception of history which Marx' materialism inherited from Hegel's idealism. As something the traveler already has in his conceptual baggage at the outset, this conception of time and history does not emerge from what he sees, but conversely shapes what he sees to begin with. Since time, according to this teleology, does not move at an even pace, but is based on modes of production (with the tendency to accelerate), we need to briefly look at this issue on the level of Marxist theory.

Kisch identifies everything economically residual in central Asia as "medieval feudalism," but this is a contentious issue. Marx, for example, in the chapter in Grundrisse called "Formen, die der kapitalistischen Produktion vorhergehen" (forms that precede capitalist production), clearly distinguished what he called the "Asiatic mode of production" from feudalism; and the nomadic or tribal cultures Kisch describes seem to fit the former rather than the latter concept. Since Marx' theorization of the Asiatic mode of production as one based on the collective and self-sustaining appropriation of produce - if usually in combination with the rule of the eldest or a despot - differs from societies based on the exploitation of slave, serf, or waged labor, Leninism and Stalinism were not very comfortable with this concept, as it could be looked at as some form of primitive communism at odds with Bolshevism. As a consequence, Soviet theoreticians simply denied Marx' theory – an otherwise sacred body of work. Al Richardson explains: "During the crucial discussion among Soviet scholars at the Yenukidze Oriental Institute in Leningrad in February 1931 M.Ia. Godes and S. Yolk pointed out that the theory of the Asiatic mode threatened the work of the Comintern in the colonial countries, and accused

its supporters of 'Trotskyite leanings'."[120] The theory, then, was temporarily removed from orthodoxy.

Consciously or not, Kisch is playing into the manipulation of Marx' work by Soviet theoreticians. By lumping together all alleged backwardness with feudalism, i.e. by homogenizing and flattening the vast space he traveled into the temporality of the succession of modes of production, Kisch is unable to find any value in the manifold ethnic traditions he encounters. Despite, or because of the highly different speeds of center and periphery in the Soviet Union, he instead imagines the country as a whole to be on a fast-train into modernity: "Over nine hundred miles lie behind us and we are still flying over the Five Year Plan. Europe – Asia? We observe no difference between them." (Kisch, 1935, p. 9)

The Five year plan, of course, was supposed to propel Soviet production to capitalist levels while using production strategies taken from the very capitalism it was thought to counter (e.g. Taylorism). In order to fast-forward the backward country, Bolshevism implemented an extremely oppressive militarization of labor that is evident in terms like "shock brigades" or "shock troops." In Kisch's rush through time (*Hetzjagd durch die Zeit,* the title of another book of his), this phenomenon is fully justified, however contemptible it may be from a Marxist (as opposed to a Stalinist) point of view. He emphatically embraces the notion of "armies of workers" and lets a Soviet worker himself describe it:

> We are forty-six workmen-soldiers, men and women alike, most of us members of the Party of Komsomols. Our oldest member is forty. We have subdivided ourselves into four sections in order to be able to compete with one another, nu wot, that is all. Good-bye. (Kisch, 1935, p. 254)

[120] This quote is taken form Al Richardson's online review of Sally L.D. Katary's *Land Tenure in the Ramesside Period*: http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol2/no4/rameside.html

And the author also emphasizes that "he is in a hurry, he must get back to work." This introduction of the disciplinary methods of industrial organization, as Michel Foucault demonstrates to well for the 18th century, causes an entirely new temporality: "[…] it must be recalled," Foucault argues in *Discipline & Punish*, "that the administrative and economic techniques of control reveal a social time of a serial, oriented, cumulative type: the discovery of an evolution in terms of 'progress'." (Foucault, p. 160)

MARX AND BLOCH IN DEFENSE OF LOCALITY

As I indicated before, the specifically local of Soviet Asia enters Kisch's account only as that which has to be overcome, as the residual of what Marx called *unegales Verhältnis der Entwicklung*, i.e. uneven development. The question with which I would like to conclude this chapter, then, is the following: Is this aggressive denial of economic "backwardness" the only possibility within Marxist thinking, or are there models that can more aptly comprehend non-synchronicities? A possible answer gives the theorist of non-synchronicity, or *Ungleichzeitigkeit*, himself: Ernst Bloch. A Marxist cultural theorist and contemporary of Kisch, Bloch initially used the concept in his *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* of 1935 in order to explain the rise of fascism in Germany and its support among the forces of reaction. Already in this book, however, written around the same time as Kisch was traveling in the Soviet Union, Bloch turns the concept against the crude phaseology at work in Kisch's *Changing Asia*. He writes:

> World history, as the bourgeois revolutionary Börne already said, is a house which has more staircases than rooms; and Marx himself, when he stresses the relatively more tolerable aspect of pre-capitalist situation, and even describes Greek art and epic poetry 'in certain aspects as a norm and unattainable model'

> (Introduction to the 'Critique of Political Economy'), then in his work this 'social childhood of humanity' is a hardly relaxed stimulus, and capitalism at any rate not the only house of history which is to be dialectically inherited. (Bloch, p. 114)[121]

In other words: the opposition to capitalism should not lead to a full-fledged denial of the potentialities of earlier modes of production, over and against which capitalism came into existence in the first place. Interestingly enough, Bloch tries to escape from what he calls *falsch verstandener marxistischer Fortschrittsdeterminismus* (a falsely understood Marxist conception of progress for its own sake) by revaluing a terminology of space. Like in the house metaphor cited above, he finds a possible future for the past in what he calls a *Polyversum* (as opposed to a *Universum*); and in his major work *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, whose single preoccupation is with the potential future of mankind, he discovers in pre-modern folk culture what he terms *Freiräume* or *Freizeit-Räume* to counter what he then saw as the common features of state capitalism and state socialism, and of what Kisch, as we have seen, was one of many heralds: the division of labor, the definition of man as worker, and the conception of time as the progressive development of productive forces.

Thanks to Theodore Shanin's study *Late Marx and the Russian Road* (1983), we can cite an even more prominent defender of locality than Bloch, namely Marx himself. To be sure, at times Marx constructed a phaseology of modes of production, with capitalism being one of the "necessary" stages. In his analysis of pre-capitalist modes of production in the *Grundrisse*, for example, while partially defending pre-modern

[121] The original reads: "Die Weltgeschichte, sagte schon der bürgerliche Revolutionär Börne, ist ein Haus, das mehr Treppen als Zimmer hat; und Marx selber, betont er das relative Erträglichere des vorkapitalistischen Zustands, bezeichnet er gar die griechische Kunst und Epos ‚in gewisser Beziehung als Norm und unerreichbare Muster' [...] so ist ihm diese ‚gesellschaftliche Kindheit der Menschheit' ein kaum gelöster Reiz, der Kapitalismus jedenfalls nicht das einzige Haus der Geschichte, das dialektisch zu beerben wäre."

societies, Marx viewed them nonetheless as forms to be overcome by progressive mankind (*progressives Menschenpack* [*Grundrisse*, p. 404]).[122] Or, more famously, Marx states apodictically in *Capital*: "The country that is more developed industrially [was destined to] show, to the less developed, the image of its own future." (*Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 91) Shanin's argument, however, is that, under the influence of Russian populism, Marx came to fundamentally question this logic, but that this late turn has been written out of Marxist theory:

> The triple origins of Marx' analytical thought suggested by Engels – German philosophy, French socialism and British political economy – should in truth be supplemented by a fourth one, that of Russian revolutionary populism. All that is easier to perceive when looked at in the late twentieth century, but the massive brainwashing of interpretation initiated by the second International is still powerful enough to turn it into a 'blind spot'. (Shanin, p. 20)

This argument is consistent with the aforementioned manipulation of Marx during the 1920s regarding the Asiatic mode of production. We do not have to go as far as saying that Marx came to see industrialization as part of the problem rather than the solution, but his late writings on the Russian peasant commune are certainly a departure from earlier traces of economic determinism. In a carefully crafted letter to the Russian populist Vera Zasulich of 1881 (he wrote four drafts), Marx comes to the conclusion:

> But the special study I have made of it [the Russian commune], including a search for original source-material, has convinced me that the commune is the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia. But in order that it might function as such, the

[122] "So erscheint die alte Anschauung, wo der Mensch, in welcher bornierten nationalen, religiösen, politischen Bestimmung auch immer als Zweck der Anschauung erscheint, sehr erhaben zu sein gegen die moderne Welt, wo die Produktion als Zweck des Menschen und der Reichtum als Zweck der Produktion erscheint. In fact aber, wenn die bornierte bürgerliche Form abgestreift wird, was ist der Reichtum anders, als die im universellen Austausch erzeugte Universalität der Bedürfnisse, Fähigkeiten, Genüsse, Produktivkräfte etc. der Individuen? Die volle Entwicklung der menschlichen Herrschaft über die Naturkräfte, die der sog. Natur sowohl wie seiner eigenen Natur?" (*Grundrisse*, pp. 395-396)

> harmful influences assailing it on all sides must first be eliminated, and it must then be assured the normal conditions for spontaneous development.[123]

Unfortunately, this defense of locality, relevant as ever during global capital's quest for new workers, untapped resources, and sales areas, came to be negatively branded as "anarchist" or "theory of spontaneity". In Shanin's words, "it was Marx who laid the foundations for the global analysis of 'unevenness' of 'development', for the socialist treatment of peasantry not only as the object or the fodder of history, for the consideration of socialism which is more than proletarian, and so on." (Shanin, p. 30) As I hope has been obvious throughout the discussion of uneven development, the position one takes in this discussion is of the greatest significance for theories of work. The road towards full-fledged industrialization, as this chapter has demonstrated, called for the erasure of the *artel* which was intricately bound to the *mir*, the peasant commune, and instituted a strict division of labor that previously had been unknown to the Russian population. German communists traveling the multi-ethnic Soviet Union during the 1920s and early 1930s participated in an essentially colonialist discourse which, given Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy at the time, seemed entirely natural to them. As I will try to show in the following chapter, only outside of orthodox communist discourse could alternative models of work and economic organization be developed.

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[123] quoted in Shanin, p. 124.

Chapter 3: A Politics and Aesthetics of Exodus: Anti-Authoritarian Socialism and the Flight from Industrial Modernity

> Capitalism is not the period of progress, but of decline. Socialism does not follow on the heels of capitalist development and the workers' fight for the means of production within capitalism.
>
> (Erich Mühsam)[124]

> The peasant in you has been overcome – and now the workman must be overcome – and Man must be the goal!
>
> (Georg Kaiser, *Gas*)

The previous two chapters presented a critical assessment of communist discourse and aesthetics of work during the Weimar years. I have demonstrated the highly contradictory nature of communist thought and practice regarding work and tightly related issues such as industrialization, rationalization, technology, machinery, the division of labor, and progress. We have seen how worker-authors carefully negotiated their fears and hopes vis-à-vis these themes in short non- or semi-fictional texts about their work place, and how they ultimately resolved them on two levels: a) thematically, by distinguishing between "good" (socialist) and "bad" (capitalist) rationalization,

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124 "Der Kapitalismus ist nicht die Periode des Fortschritts, sondern des Verfalls. Der Sozialismus kommt nicht auf dem Wege der Weiterentwicklung des Kapitalismus und kommt nicht durch den Produzentenkampf der Arbeiter innerhalb des Kapitalismus." (quoted in Rectors/Fähndrich, p. 33).

division of labor, use of technology, etc.; and b) aesthetically, by subscribing to a largely productivist model of literature with the goal of eradicating the boundaries between artistic and social/industrial production. On both levels, developments in the Soviet Union served as decisive points of reference, fostered by a voluntary and intensive cultural exchange (worker delegations, party delegates, artists) as well as through the encroachment of the Bolshevists on German communism. In short: so far it has been all work, no play!

By reading late Marx against the grain of Marxism-Leninism at the end of the previous chapter, I have already set the tone for the second part of this study about anti-authoritarian socialism (the various anarchist and/or syndicalist groups) of the Weimar Republic. Much less influential than communism (especially from 1924 onward[125]), and no less contradictory in its attitudes toward work, this camp of individualist anarchists (so-called Stirnerianer like Ret Marut/B. Traven), socialist anarchists (e.g. Gustav Landauer) anarcho-syndicalists (e.g. Rudolf Rocker), anti-authoritarian socialists (e.g. Rudolf Grossmann), communist anarchists or anarcho-communists (e.g. Erich Mühsam) – we could continue this list as there was no shortage of factions and designations at the time – challenged modernization on the whole and rejected the Soviet model in its socio-economic *and* aesthetic dimensions.

The passage from Erich Mühsam, with which I chose to open this chapter, demonstrates nicely the radical anti-authoritarian opposition to social democracy, communism, and orthodox Marxism-Leninism at the time. In his conception, there is no automatic transition to communism based on the "ripening" of relations of production, no

[125] For a discussion of why anti-authoritarian socialism started waning around 1924, see Bock, pp. 66-70, where he cites a number of internal (factional battles) and external (state repression, economic stabilization) as the main reasons for its decline.

historical necessity of capitalism on the road to communism. Rather, the political and aesthetic strategies of these groups can be summarized, as I have done in the title for this chapter, under the term 'exodus:' a term that, in Paolo Virno's current usage, means an "engaged withdrawal" (Virno 1996, 196) or "defection" from the modern nation state (the common denominator of all anti-authoritarian socialism/anarchism) and industrial modernity. [126] This terminological choice is justified also by the frequent use of terms such as *Austritt* or *Absonderung* (defection, withdrawal, or: exodus) from capitalism (e.g. Landauer's "Durch Absonderung zur Gemeinschaft" [Community through Withdrawal) at the time. It was industrial, waged, and divided labor itself they attacked – in both its capitalist and socialist variants. Consequently, alternative ways of living, working, and writing would have to be either developed in communes within Germany, or at least imagined within pre-industrial landscapes. As I hope will become evident later on, this trajectory – the resistance to the imposition of waged labor – makes the Weimar anti-authoritarian socialists much more relevant to our contemporary moment than the communists despite their often overly romantic solutions to social issues. Indeed, one could argue that they represent a pre-history for (labor) theoreticians who have informed my own approach to this study: Ulrich Beck, Andre Górz, Anson Rabinbach, Paolo Virno, et al. My interest in anti-authoritarian socialism is therefore as much symptomatic as it is historical.

Very frequently, however, their essentially anti-modern and metaphysical ruminations are almost impossible to digest for readers today, and we need to be critical of their pitfalls regarding the conceptualizations of class, gender and race. As we will see,

[126] According to Hans Manfred Bock, the three common denominators of the anti-authoritarian bloc, aside from antiauthoritarianism, were antiparliamentarism and antimilitarism. His account, however, does not sufficiently account for its opposition to industrial modernity and the forms of labor it requires. (Bock, p. 66)

there is at times some proximity between the anti-modernism on the political left and right, and this proximity needs to be taken seriously. Without romanticizing this fairly marginal anti-authoritarian socialist camp, I am interested in the ways in which it took issue with the 'laborization' (Hannah Arendt) of the modern world through theories, alternative living projects, and literary practices.

Parallel to the first part of this dissertation, Chapter Three concentrates on the status of anti-authoritarian socialist theories of, and literature about, work in Germany, while Chapter Four takes us beyond German borders to see what models where proposed as viable alternatives, and which literary genres were used to do so. Again in accordance with the first part on communism, this couple of chapters will focus not so much on the best-known authors within this antiauthoritarian camp (such as Theodor Pliviér, Franz Jung, Erich Mühsam, and others) as on texts about work which were accessible to a large audience through newspapers such as *Die Aktion* and *Der Syndikalist*, even though they were not written by first-rate authors. In so doing, I am following Simon Goldhill's suggestion to write a "literary history without literature" that would account for discursive practices "beyond book production and vocalization and literacy and provides a more culturally nuanced history than the 'history of literature.'" (Goldhill, p. 196) Even though Goldhill focuses on such practices in the antiquity, I believe his challenge to literary history to be equally fruitful when talking about marginal(ized) discourse of any other period. In our case, such an approach also can better account for the fact that, as Hajo Schmück has pointed out, the press has always been more vital for anarchism than other media. (Schmück, p. 177)[127]

[127] Similarly, Andrew Carlson states: "A serious study of anarchism is virtually impossible unless one has access to a large number of anarchist newspapers and pamphlets." (Carlson, p. 3)

And second, by working with such an expanded notion of literature, I am aiming at laying bare deeper layers of anti-authoritarian thinking and writing about labor and the ways in which it differs from its communist counterpart. Hence, my approach is more geared towards the concerns of cultural studies than towards those of intellectual/literary history. As in the first chapters, it will be imperative to ask not only about the main ideas of anti-authoritarian socialism and hence remain purely on the level of 'intellectual history', but to analyze the discourse on labor in the material context within which they could arise.

To a certain extent, we have already mapped out this context: it is largely the same as the one described in the previous chapters and one that served the anti-authoritarian left as an almost entirely inimical sea in which islands of new consciousness and practice had to be established. The same holds true for matters of aesthetics and formal choices: While anti-authoritarian socialists also attempted to reintegrate art into social practice, they did not use 'labor' as the umbrella (under which the communist reintegration took shape). By contrast, they radically challenged the central status of labor in both communist and capitalist ideology, and hence did not seek to turn artists into 'producers'. Instead, they often subscribed to an idea of 'creation' (including its religious connotations) which they saw at work not only in the arts proper, but in any kind of creative human activity, i.e., in 'work.'

Therefore, the literary discourse on work is not presented in ways that seek to emulate the latest methods of industrial production, as so often was the case among communists. Like their conception of work, their aesthetic choices are essentially pre-modern, anti-modern, and frequently anti-modernist. Here, the connection with expressionism will be important, as my opening quotation of Georg Kaiser's

expressionist play *Gas* indicates, as well as a related, yet distinct understanding founded on the total rejection of art as something distinct from other quotidian practices.

To be sure, one needs to be mindful of the rather diverse nature of what I have, so far, summarily termed anti-authoritarian socialism. At least two main traditions can be distinguished, even though they often intersect. The individual-anarchist faction fed on the Stirner-Renaissance that took place in the young Weimar Republic and was largely opposed to attempts of collective action.[128] The other faction, referred to at the time most frequently as anarcho-syndicalism, gained traction through the publication of Peter Kropotkin's works in German, which also occurred in the early years of the Weimar Republic.[129] Still, by comparison with Weimar communism, anti-authoritarian socialism was rather marginal. This is less true for the early years of the Weimar Republic, when the *Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands* (FAUD) had up to 150,000 members, all of whom would receive its weekly *Der Syndikalist* in the mail (*Die Aktion*, by comparison, never sold more than 8000 copies). The anti-authoritarian socialist camp was largely composed of members of the working class, with a strong syndicalist base in the Ruhr valley; at the same time, however, many of its leading spokespeople came out of the literary bohème, such as Erich Mühsam, Gustav Landauer, Heinrich Vogeler, Adam Scharrer, or Theodor Plivier. Therefore, the movement was marked by a prolific literary and artistic activity.[130] With the advent of the stabilization period in the mid-1920s,

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[128] See Rector/Fähndrich, p. 309.

[129] *The Conquest of Bread* (Die Eroberung des Brotes. Wohlstand für Alle, translated into German in 1920) and *Brain Work and Manual Work: Fields, Factories and Workshops* (Landwirtschaft, Industrie und Handwerk, translated in 1921. Both texts were published by the publishing house *Der Syndikalist*).

[130] "Da nicht wenige Vertreter des Linksradikalismus der literarisch interessierten und selbst schriftstellerisch tätigen Intelligenz angehörten, andererseits auch schreibende Arbeiter aus dem weiteren Umkreis des Linksradikalismus kamen, kann das intensive Interesse an Dingen der Kultur und Literatur,

however, the numbers decline sharply and the various anti-authoritarian branches on the left are no longer attractive as alternatives. The *Barkenhoff-Siedlung* near Bremen, for example, a utopian community led by the painter Vogeler, was ended in 1923 when Vogeler switched over to the Communist Party.

As this is not first and foremost a study of Weimar anarchism and/or anarcho-syndicalism and its various factions, I am less interested in keeping the different anarchist branches separate than in asking about the opposition to industrial capitalism/socialism they have in common. Hence my choice of the term anti-authoritarian socialism which allows for such an integrated approach. In doing so, I am following in the footsteps of the standard-bearing, two-volume study of Weimar anarchism and anarchist literature by Fähnders and Rector (1974). While recognizing substantial differences within the movement, they suggest the term *Linksradikalismus* (left radicalism) as a way of comprising the various separate, but intersecting, groups.[131] I only reject their term *Linksradikalismus*, as it is a loaded and polemical one with which Lenin ridiculed anarchist tendencies.[132] My own term is closer to Hans Manfred Bock's, who uses the term 'anti-authoritarian camp' under which he subsumes three main "left-radical" movements during the Weimar Republic: anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism, and unionism.

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das die linksradikale Programmatik prägte, ja bisweilen ihre Revolutionstheorie ausmachte, nicht verwundern." (Fähnders/Rector, p. 11)

[131] They argue that anarchist and left communist tendencies converged after 1918 despite the scattered nature of the movement: "So entstand, angereichert durch die zahlreichen Spaltungen und Filiationen innerhalb der beiden großen Traditionen, nach 1918 in Deutschland ein Konglomerat von verschiedenen linksradikalen Gruppierungen, die sich zwar nicht selten untereinander befehdeten, die aber nicht zuletzt durch ihre gemeinsame Stoßrichtung gegen die Kommunistische Partei eine relativ einheitliche Strömung darstellten." (Fähnders/Rector, p. 75)

[132] In a well-known essay, Lenin called "left-wing communism" and its anti-authoritarian embrace of spontaneity an "infantile disorder."

(Bock, p. 63)[133] However, I would insist on keeping the term 'socialism,' as the various tendencies – even individual-anarchists such as Marut/Traven – identified themselves as socialists (not "scientific" socialists, of course, but socialists with a "utopian" agenda). This choice has also has the advantage of circumventing the term anarchism – one of the most severely misunderstood terms there is.

THE CRITIQUE OF THE SOVIET UNION

Let us approach the anti-authoritarian position on work first by way of its critique of the Soviet Union. Across the board, the various anarchist and syndicalist groups characterized post-revolutionary Russia as a form of "state capitalism" at complete odds with the values of workers' rule and self-determination – a perspective we have already encountered in the previous chapter with the German unionist Judith Grünfeld and the Russian dissident Alexandra Kollontai.

The most important authority for anti-authoritarian socialists in assessing the situation in the Soviet Union was Otto Rühle. A MP for the Social Democrats before the war, Rühle joined the council communist KAPD and was their delegate to the 1920 world congress of the Comintern in Moscow. Disillusioned by the situation in Russia, Rühle left the congress early, became an outspoken critic of Bolshevism, and moved closer and closer to anarcho-syndicalist positions throughout the 1920s. His identification of Soviet communism with "state capitalism" (e.g. in *Von der bürgerlichen zur proletarischen Revolution* [From Bourgeois to Proletarian Revolution] or in *Der autoritäre Mensch und*

[133] Like Fähnders/Rector, Bock sees "open borders and fluid crossings and interactions between the three components of the anti-authoritarian camp." (Bock, p. 63)

die Revolution [Authoritarian Man and Revolution]) was widely discussed in *Der Syndikalist* and *Die Aktion*. As early as 1920, Rühle recognized that the Soviet state apparatus was far from "withering away." Instead of federations and councils he saw party centralism that left no room for initiative among workers and peasants. In particular, he branded the "authoritarian principle"[134] with which the revolution was carried out and which, subsequently, prevented new subjectivities from being created. In an article published in *Der Syndikalist* (Nr. 38/1920), Rühle even stated that Russia will be "the last country in which true communism will be built." Like most anti-authoritarian socialists, Rühle insisted on the importance of revolutionary subjectivities that needed to be created alongside institutional changes, and he found little of that in the early Soviet Union.

Of similar importance was Alexander Berkman's critique of the Soviet Union. A born Jew from the Baltic, Berkman became an American citizen, spent 14 years in prison for the attempted assassination of Henry Clay Frick, and was finally deported to the Soviet Union together with fellow anarchist Emma Goldmann in 1919. Initially a supporter of the October Revolution, Berkman turned against Bolshevism after the suppression of the Kronstadt uprising in 1921. Like Rühle, Berkman enjoyed credibility as a native informant and his writings about the Kronstadt rebellion and other critical writings about authoritarian rule in the Soviet Union were widely disseminated in the anti-authoritarian press (see, for example, his article "Die russische Tragödie" [The Russian Tragedy] in *Der Syndikalist* in week 32/1923).

The main critique of the Soviet Union revolved around the issue of industrialization and the principles by which it was driven. An exemplary illustration of

[134] *Die Aktion* 19/20, 1925

this critique is Max Bachner's lithography *Grüße aus Sowjetrußland* (Greetings from Soviet Russia) which Franz Pfemfert used for the cover of *Die Aktion* in 1926 [figure 4]. Silhouettes of seven highly fragmented human bodies flee to the left and right of the enormous impact and explosion of some undefined structure in an urban landscape, blending equally abstract housing complexes and industrial machinery. The people are literally driven to the margins, while the upper half of the image is already unpopulated, and the center features the words "Oh Moskau."

The technique of the lithography, based as it is on crude, bold strokes, is well suited to capture the onslaught of new machinery and, at the same time, preserves itself a distance from the growing fascination with the engineerial exactitude this machinery introduces. Industrialization does not appear as the road, but an obstacle on the road to socialism. Despite the industrial origins of syndicalism, this position was shared and further explicated in *Der Syndikalist* in articles such as "Industrialisierung, aber kein Sozialismus! Die Widersprüche der bolschewistischen Wirtschaftspolitik" (Industrialization, but not Socialism! The Contradictions of Bolshevist Economics, *Der Syndikalist*, 16/1930) or "Sozialismus oder Kapitalismus – Der Aufbau der Industrie in Rußland" (Socialism or Capitalism – Industrialization in Russia, *Der Syndikalist*, 40/1930). These articles describe the Soviet economy – at best – as a mélange with liberal, state capitalist, and despotic ingredients, with occasional socialist seasoning.[135] Consequently, the anti-authoritarian socialist press vehemently attacked the rosy reports of the *Rußlanddelegation* of which we heard in chapter two (see "An die zweite Russlanddelegation" [To the Second Delegation to Russia] in *Die Aktion* 9/1926).

[135] "Diese kann keinesfalls als kommunistisch oder sozialistisch bezeichnet werden, wenn auch in dem unendlichen Meere privatwirtschaftlicher und staatskapitalistischer Beziehungen einige sozialistische oder genossenschaftliche Elemente herumschwimmen." (*Der Syndikalist*, 16/1930).

A NON-CLASS OF NON-WORKERS: THE ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN SOCIALIST DISCOURSE OF WORK

If anti-authoritarian socialists rejected the Soviet model in such stark terms, what alternative models did they propose instead? For an answer to this question, let us now gain an overview of the thinking about work in anti-authoritarian socialist thought during the Weimar period, as reflected in some key texts. With an even smaller base of actually employed industrial workers than the communists, most anti-authoritarian socialists had little interest in the pragmatist and gradual improvement of working conditions. Even syndicalists, despite their strong anchors in industrial organizations, wrote and acted from a perspective largely outside the work-place.

It has been conclusively demonstrated that the syndicalist union FAUD attracted a disproportionate number of unskilled laborers after 1918, whose interests differed with the rank-and-file workers of the other unions. (Briefs 1927, Roth 1977, Rübner 1994)[136] In current terminology, they belonged to a struggling 'multitude' rather than to the class-conscious proletariat, especially since the percentage of im(migrant) workers was rather high. (Rübner, p. 70) From this outsider position, they were able to follow much more radical goals than higher wages, shorter working hours, or even the ownership of the means of production under a central government.

Rudolf Rocker, the main figure of German syndicalism at the time, invoked Charles Fourier's theory of 'attractive work' even when writing about contemporary

[136] That holds true even though syndicalism originated as a movement of skilled workers who resisted industrialization. For a good case study, see Rudolf Boch's *Handwerker-Sozialisten gegen Fabrikgesellschaft. Lokale Fachvereine, Massengewerkschaft und industrielle Rationalisierung in Solingen 1870 bis 1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985).

issues such as rationalization. At the same time, he delivers a scathing critique of Marxist-Leninist and social democratic thinking at the time:

> But who cares today about the premature fantasies of a hopeless 'utopian', who had not grasped the 'scientific basis of socialism.' Socialists today are caught in Marxist doctrine to such as extent as to have lost any sense of the deeper, spiritual problems of socialism. (Rocker, p. 191)[137]

By "deeper spiritual problems of socialism", Rocker essentially means what the earlier chapters have demonstrated as Marx' and Engels' early (and again the late Marx') so-called 'humanist' position on work, which was very much focused on the issue of 'alienation'. This term, of course, positing some originary, *ur*-communist state from which alienation wrests us, raises many questions about the dialectics of origins and development: where do we find such an ur-communist state? Is alienation not a necessary corollary of consciousness? And even if there were such a thing: what is its driving force? In their responses to such questions, anarcho-syndicalists like Rocker pointed to the division of labor as the founding evil of modern society and proposed ways to overcome it. From the perspective of the anti-authoritarians, the division of labor is mostly 'anomic' in its consequences. Its collectivist aspect, which Durkheim had

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[137]"Doch wer kümmert sich heute noch um die unreifen Phantasien eines hoffnungslosen 'Utopisten', der die 'wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen des Sozialismus' noch nicht erfaßt hatte. Das heutige Geschlecht ist so sehr in marxistischen Zwangsvorstellungen befangen, daß es überall nur ökonomische Notwendigkeiten und historische Missionen vor sich sieht und aus diesem Grunde für die tieferen seelischen Probleme des Sozialismus jedes Verständnis verloren hat."

highlighted in his *The Division of Labor in Society*, does not enter into their consideration.[138]

On this issue, Peter Kropotkin turned out to be the main point of reference for Weimar anarchists of all colors, and even surpassed Bakunin in significance. Two main texts of Kropotkin's are cited over and over again in the anarchist press at the time: *Brain Work and Manual Work: Fields, Factories and Workshops* and *The Conquest of Bread*. In these works, the Russian revolutionary prepared the ideological base not only for Weimar anarchist theory of work, but also for the various communes which tried to live by this theory. Part and parcel of his theory is the rejection of a one-sided focus on industrialization and its Taylorist principles in favor of a reintegration of field, artisanal, and industrial work along with the collective organization of all socially necessary tasks. In a society founded on these cornerstones, full-fledged specialization and division of labor would cease to exist, and no member of the collective would be able to take advantage of another. Wealth would be evenly distributed, regardless of each member's capacities or capabilities. When Kropotkin quotes Marx approvingly, then it is first and foremost his famous sentence from his *Critique of the Gotha Program*: "Each according to his needs, from each according to his abilities." In *Brain Work and Manual Work*, Kropotkin's ideal worker is a Renaissance man, for whom the planning and execution of a project are still intricately linked. He writes:

> In short, with our great geniuses handicraft was no obstacle to abstract researches- it rather favoured them. On the other band, if the workers of old found but few opportunities for mastering science, many of them had, at least, their intelligences stimulated by the very variety of work which was performed in the then

[138] Durkheim did theorize the 'anomic' consequences of the division of labor, and even made a connection between this process and growing suicide rates. On the whole, however, he defended the division of labor as a cooperative practice.

> unspecialised workshops; and some of them had the benefit of familiar intercourse with men of science. (Kropotkin, p. 364)

By stark contrast, he strongly disapproves of modern factory organization which, since Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, had become almost universally accepted as without alternatives – despite Smith's own, rather dire remarks about his famous pin factory.[139] Kropotkin continues:

> But since the great factory been enthroned, the worker, depressed by the monotony of his work, invents no more. What can a weaver invent who merely supervises four looms, without knowing anything either about their complicated movements or how the machines grew to be what they are? (Kropotkin, p. 367)

While communists argued similarly, they put their trust in the technological development of the productive apparatus and its ability for complete mechanization, with the workers being relieved from the monotony of the present work. Kropotkin, on the other hand, is also not opposed to technological advancement; however, this advancement was not to be measured by standards of productivity and the 'right to work', but ultimately by standards of social justice, the development of all human faculties, and the 'right to well-being.' Torn between such a medieval, labor-intensive conception of artisanal work on one side, and a modern industrial one on the other, anti-authoritarian socialist also pushed for a shortening of the workday. While social democrats and communists were involved in concrete struggles for the eight-hour workday, anti-authoritarian socialists claimed that – after the abolition of waged labor – the workday could be shortened much more significantly. Again Kropotkin:

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[139] For this discussion, see Richard Sennett's *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, p. 35-38.

> We must recognize that Franklin was right in saying that to work five hours a day would generally do for supplying each member of a civilized nation with the comfort now accessible for the few only, provided everybody took his due share in production. But we have made some progress since Franklin's times, not to say a word of further progress. More than one-half of the working day would thus remain to everyone for the pursuit of art, science, or any hobby he might choose to like. (Kropotkin, p. 407)

The Austrian Rudolf Grossmann, writing under the not-so-modest pseudonym Pierre Ramus and reviewed rather critically in the German anti-authoritarian socialist press[140], calculated that even Franklin's number could be cut in less than half. In his *Die Neuschöpfung der Gesellschaft durch den kommunistischen Anarchismus* (The Rebirth of Society through Communist Anarchism) of 1923, Grossmann/Ramus largely followed Kropotkin's line of argument in *The Conquest of Bread*, but added very detailed calculations regarding the work required from each member of the community. For a community of 10 000 members, he estimates two hours of daily work in order to produce the means of subsistence. Since he assumes work – understood as creative activity, not as a 'job' – to be the most innate drive of every human being, the boundaries between this socially necessary work and any other human expression would become fluid or even cease to exist entirely. Ramus states:

> Let us not forget that the members of our anarchist-communist community have to choose their trade only at the age of twenty, that they will therefore love it and be able to change it at all times. It is therefore clear that everybody will work longer than two hours daily. It is work that is freely chosen, work whose result benefits the worker directly and indirectly, work that is only done when the worker feels inclined to do it. (Ramus, p. 260)[141]

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[140] See, for example, the attack on Ramus in *Die Aktion* from December 1924.

[141] "Wenn wir uns des weiteren vergegenwärtigen, daß die entscheidende Berufswahl aller unserer produktiven Elemente in der anarchistisch-kommunistischen Gemeinde erst mit dem 20. Lebensjahr

While the individual calculations differ, anti-authoritarian socialists agreed that only a drastic reduction of working-hours could lead to a more just distribution of work. Being acutely aware of the hopeless situation of those permanently out of work – again, the larger portion of the anti-authoritarian socialist support came from those marginalized by the economic system – they did not believe in the existence of a 'working-class' or a 'proletariat', as these terms suggest rather unified, cohesive subjects. It has always been a common-place to criticize radical groups for the splintering of the Weimar left, often blaming them indeed for the rise of fascism. What anarchists like Rocker pointed out, however, was the illusory nature of the assumption that the working-class could ever speak with one voice under a capitalist system to begin with. Rocker, the leading figure of the Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands (FAUD), writes in his *Die Rationalisierung der Wirtschaft und die Arbeiterklasse* (Rationalization and the Working Class) of 1927:

> The old notion of the existence of a unified proletarian class, whose members depend on each other due to their common material interests, has always clashed with the facts ... The strongest opposition develops between employed and unemployed proletarians. All this talk about a unified class does not help here, where the facts are stronger than the loftiest of theories. The employed worker has great interest in keeping his unemployed colleagues away from his own job, while the latter has set his eyes on that same job. Naturally, he usually would not care whether or not another will have to lose that job. (Rocker, p. 81f)[142]

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einzusetzen braucht, sie alle somit ihren Beruf lieben, ihn stets nach Belieben wechseln können, so ist von vornherein klar, daß die Menschen freiwillig vielleicht länger als zwei Stunden täglich arbeiten werden. Arbeit in Freiheit, ihr Ergebnis unmittelbar wie mittelbar dem Erzeuger zugute kommend, jede nur gefordert, wenn die natürliche Arbeitslust im Menschen sich regt."

[142] "Die alte Behauptung von der Existenz einer einheitlichen proletarischen Klasse, deren einzelne Glieder durch ihre natürlichen materiellen Interessen aufeinander angewiesen seien, war nie mehr wie eine Behauptung, die den eigentlichen Tatsachen direkt ins Gesicht schlug ... Am schärfsten aber entwickeln sich die Gegensätze zwischen den beschäftigten und unbeschäftigten Proleten. Da hilft alles Gerede von der einheitlichen Klasse nichts, die Tatsachen sind auch hier stärker als die schönste Theorie. Der im Betrieb stehende Arbeiter hat alles Interesse daran, seinen arbeitslosen Kollegen von seinem Platze fernzuhalten,

Using more recent terminology, we could say that Rocker shifts here conceptually from the 'proletariat' to the 'precariat', a shift prefiguring the change the industrialized world has been experiencing for some time now after the relative stability after WWII. This conceptual change accounts for the declining number of people employed in full-time and stable working relationships and the rising number of those in so-called 'precarious' ones. In his *Farewell to the Working-Class* of 1980, Andre Górz speaks of a "non-class of non-workers" as a new revolutionary subject, a formula well-suited to describe the self-understanding of anti-authoritarian socialism during the Weimar Republic. Górz does not mean to say that the members of this non-class do not perform work. But he refuses to narrow them down to the performance of waged labor: "I have used the term 'a non-class of non-workers' to designate the stratum that experiences its work as an externally imposed obligation in which 'you waste your life to earn your living." (Górz, p. 7)

But just like the theoreticians of 'autonomist Marxism'[143] today, the Weimar anarchists did not at all lament the fact that not everybody could be employed full-time in the factory. Such employment was commonly referred to as *Lohnsklaverei* (wage slavery). Loathing instead such working relationships in general, they were interested in

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während dieser natürlich bestrebt ist, wieder in einem Betriebe unterzukommen, wobei es ihm in der Regel gar nicht darauf ankommt, wenn ein anderer dadurch auf die Straße geworfen wird."

[143] Paolo Virno (2003) and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000, 2004) have tried to overcome the exclusionary logic of the term 'working-class' by recovering the concept of 'multitude' which had fallen out of favor in political theory with the advent of the nation state: "In its most narrow usage the concept [the working class] is employed to refer only to industrial workers, separating them from workers in agriculture, services, and other sectors; at its most broad, working class refers to all waged workers, separating them from the poor, unpaid domestic laborers, and all others who do not receive a wage. The multitude, in contrast, is an open, inclusive concept." (Hardt/Negri 2004, p. xiv)

freeing up time for activities other than work/labor – something autonomist Marxism refers to as 'self-valorization' (as opposed to the valorization of capital).

Across the anti-authoritarian socialist press, we witness a significant number of articles which call into question the very notion of 'work/labor'. Certainly, anarchists would always disapprove of those who exploit the labor of others without working themselves – see for example the article "Nicht Herrschaft, Arbeit ist Ehre!" (Not Power, Work is Honorable) in *Der Syndikalist* 43/1919. But while, in this article, work is called an "honor", it condemns at the same time the idea of waged labor. Moreover, the article is followed by another one addressing the same issue that carries the title "Arbeiten! Arbeiten! Arbeiten" (Work! Work! Work!). There, the author invokes biology – a move popular among anarchists since Kropotkin's study *Mutual Aid,* in which he tried to found anarchist ideas on a scientific base – to de-naturalize existing ideas about work:

> What is this – work? Only few species are familiar with what we call work: bees, ants, termites, and human beings. The fox in its hole and on the hunt, the bird in its nest and in search of insects or grains – they all struggle for survival; but they do not work.[144]

If work in and of itself is, according to the author, quite exceptional, how much more so is the idea of waged labor, in which people produce things to which they often have no relation whatsoever! A similar article with the title "Arbeit?" (Work?) that I have cited already in the introduction makes this even more explicit through an embrace of a "primitive" way of life:

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[144] "Was ist denn das – Arbeit? Nur wenige Tierarten kennen das, was wir Arbeit nennen: Bienen, Ameisen, Termiten und Menschen. Der Fuchs in seinem Bau und auf der Jagd, der Vogel in seinem Neste und beim Insektenfang oder Körnersuchen – sie alle müssen sich mühen, um zu leben; aber sie arbeiten nicht."

> The question is: is work natural? As we speak, there are still peoples in existence who lie in the sand without performing 'work', who smoke, play tunes on pipes, swim, hunt, fish, garden, stuff themselves, have sex – i.e. live playfully without the preoccupation with progress – it therefore seems rather clear that only in Europe, where so many people share so little space, the majority is forced to work on behalf of the non-working minority.[145]

The author finds an alternative way of life in China, where he believes people to work "without any obligation" (*unter Vermeidung irgendwelchen Zwanges von außen*) as a "child of a great culture" (*Kind einer großen Kultur*) opposed to the foolishness of civilization (*ohne zivilisatorischen Blödsinn*). Here, the author participates in one of the main intellectual debates of the time, namely the one about culture versus civilization. While he sides with the term 'culture', he does not fill it with the heavy nationalist meaning often invoked in statements about the German *Kulturnation* at the time. His understanding of *Kultur* is universal in the sense of *Kulturvölker*, whereas *Zivilisation* is denigrated for the author equates it with *Fortschrittswahn* (frenzy of progress) and opposition to nature.

This article is a good example of the frequently a-historical nature of anti-authoritarian discourse. The argument indeed amounts to nothing short of what we would call today an orientalist fantasy in its falsely romantic reading of Chinese civilization. As

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145 "Fragestellung: Ist Arbeit selbstverständlich? Da es heute noch Völkerschaften gibt, die ohne Arbeitsleistung im Sande liegen, rauchen, auf Rohrflöten blasen, schwimmen, jagen, fischen, gärtnern, fressen, koitieren, also spielerisch und ohne den berüchtigten Fortschrittswahn leben, wird deutlich, daß lediglich die Zusammenballung vieler Menschen auf verhältnismäßig kleinem Raum (Europa) zur zwangsweisen Betätigung der Mehrheit zugunsten der faulenzenden Minderheit zwingt."

opposed to fascism, anti-authoriarian thought did not view its *Schollenromantik* (romanticism of the soil) in opposition to exoticism; rather, it viewed them as complementary. As we will see in the next chapter, this conjunction is often employed when talking about allegedly pre-industrial, non-Western spaces.

The article also shows that anti-authoritarians opposed the productivity-oriented organization of work in favor of a task-oriented one in which, as E.P. Thompson's seminal essay "Customs in Common" shows, the concept of accumulation over long periods of time was not existent. At the same time, task-orientation also implies that every member of society would have to be involved in a multitude of different activities – or the ability not to produce anything, to indulge in abundance, once all tasks are completed**.** Clearly, the embrace of pre-industrial attitudes toward work is leveled against the productivist ethos of work to which communists largely subscribed. Ret Marut/B. Traven, of whom we will hear more in the next chapter, polemicized in his newspaper *Der Ziegelbrenner* against the equation of socialism with work as follows:

> Which leads us to the next lie and falsification: socialism equals work! According to simple mathematic rule, work would have to equal socialism. Because: 3x4=12, therefore 12=3x4 and also: 4x3=12. Hence, if the statement ‚socialism equals work' and its logical reversal ‚work equals socialism' were true rather than a lie of political parties, then we would have already had socialism before the war when Germany consisted exclusively of work. And we would have simply been idiots for not noticing it. (*Der Ziegelbrenner*)[146]

[146] "Und so kommen wir zu dieser neuen Lüge und Fälschung: Sozialismus ist Arbeit! Dann muß nach der einfachsten mathematischen Regel natürlich Arbeit auch Sozialismus sein. Denn: 3X4=12, also auch 12=3X4 und auch: 4X3=12. Wäre nun der Satz 'Sozialismus ist Arbeit' und also auch seine logische Umkehrung 'Arbeit ist Sozialismus' richtig und keine Parteilüge, dann hätten wir vor dem Kriege, wo Deutschland nur aus Arbeit bestand, ja bereits den Sozialismus gehabt und nur wir alle waren die großen Trottel, weil wir es gar nicht bemerkten." (2/1919)

Indeed, the often-heard slogan 'right to work' is countered by the 'right to joy' (*Recht auf Freude*). In an article with this title of 1919, Fritz Oerter goes even a step further by claiming not only a right, but a duty to joy. Through Christian ethics and the numbing labor process, he argues, people have become entirely unable to lead a joyous life:

> Slowly but surely, humans have become unable to feel true pleasure. Body and mind are numbed down, dull habit enthralls them like a coat that neither rain, snow, and cold nor warmth and sun can penetrate. Our contemporaries are like worn out hand organs that lack the highest and lowest tones and play only rather monotonous music.[147]

Not *Vergnügen* (pleasure, diversion) is the alternative for Oerter, but a truly collective existence: "All needs to belong to all! From each according to his abilities, each according to his needs. Only he can be happy who is not burdened by the yoke of possession or the torture of poverty, who is equal among equals."[148] In a similar article with the title "Daseinsfreude" (Pleasure of Being), the anonymous author juxtaposes the down-trodden German workers with the joyful existence of the ancient Greeks – a comparison unthinkable in communist circles, at least without pointing to the existence of slavery which made this joyous existence possible in the first place.

As an anthropological argument, however, pointing out that physical labor and trade had only in more recent history become socially respected was (and continues to be)

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[147] "Die Menschen sind nach und nach unfähig gemacht worden, wahre und echte Freuden zu empfinden. Körper und Geist sind abgestumpft, es hüllt sie dumpfe Gewohnheit ein wie ein Mantel, den Regen, Schnee, Kälte aber auch Wärme und Sonne nicht zu durchdringen vermögen. Die Menschen unserer Zeit sind wie ausgeleierte Drehorgeln, denen die höchsten wie die tiefsten Töne fehlen und die infolgedessen nur eine recht monotone unvollkommene Musik hören lassen."

[148] "Alles soll allen gehören! Jeder nach seinen Fähigkeiten, jeder nach seinen Bedürfnissen! Freuen kann sich nur der, den nicht die Last des Besitzes und die Qual des Nichtbesitzens drückt, der sich ein Gleicher unter Gleichen fühlt."

a powerful tool of critique of both capitalist and socialist ideology of work. What makes Hellenic culture attractive to anti-authoritarian socialism is its emphasis on what Hanna Arendt calls 'action', i.e. the free and voluntary *Betätigung* (activity) within and for the social body; naturally, in anarchist thought this activity would have to comprise socially necessary labor as well. Karl Roche, in his article "Arbeit und Faulheit" (Work and Laziness, *Der Syndikalist* 9/1919), sums it up well with the following Lessing-quote (from his poem "Faul zu sein – sei meine Pflicht" [May Laziness Be My Solemn Duty]): "Lasst uns faul in allen Sachen, Nur nicht faul zu Lieb' und Wein, Nur nicht faul zur Faulheit sein." (Let us be lazy in everything, except in loving and drinking, except in being lazy.)

As a consequence, the Weimar anti-authoritarian socialist press featured a high number of reflections on unemployment, and qualified it very different from the communist press. Among the semi-literary articles in *Der Syndikalist* which deal explicitly with the issue of work, several [such as "Arbeitslos. Ein Zeitbild" (43/1920), "Sklaven" (6/1921), or "Arbeitslos" (6/1921)] discuss its absence rather than its manifestations. It is rather noteworthy that none of those texts laments the existence of substantial unemployment under capitalism at the time. Based on the premise that only socially "useful" (i.e., autonomous) work is desirable, the anti-authoritarian authors do not wish to see more 'jobs' for sales clerks or chemical workers. As we can see in figure 5, capitalist production was often viewed as synonymous with production for war. H. Walter writes in "Arbeitslos":

> To be unemployed means: not to be productive, not to be allowed to contribute to the common goals of society? No! Not for capitalism, not for the fat cats, the

> parasites, who live at the expense of others and don't know what to do with all the abundance.[149]

Having made this distinction between voluntary work for the common good and waged or salaried labor for a capitalist patron, Walter leaves no doubt that he invests little hope in market laws to take their course. Instead, he invokes Kropotkin in combination with the voluntarism characteristic of anarchist thought: "Welfare for all is not a dream. No, it is not, but we need to have the will to it! Not in 100, not in 1000 years, but tomorrow, tomorrow, no, today we need to have that will!"[150]

The short pieces "Sklaven" (Slaves) and "Arbeitslos. Ein Zeitbild" (Unemployed. A Scene from Contemporary Life) both drive home the same point: that progressive politics must not buy into the glorification of hard work. While the anonymous author of "Sklaven" attacks the capitalist work ethic directly ("The army of drones keeps on yelling: only work, work, work can save us! And they are right. The work of others can save them, the idlers."[151]), Erich Heymann blasts even the welfare state, the cherished goal of large segments of the workers' movement. From his perspective, the welfare state is simply the necessary stabilizer of capitalism, an agent of 'false charity',[152] subjecting the workers to de-humanizing processes of control and surveillance. His list of alternative

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[149] "Arbeitslos sein heißt: nicht produktiv tätig sein, nicht schaffen dürfen für die Allgemeinheit? Nein! Nicht für den Kapitalismus, nicht für die Schlemmer und Prasser, die Parasiten, die von den Knochen anderer schlemmen und nicht wissen, was sie mit dem Ueberfluß (sic!) anfangen sollen."

[150] "Der Wohlstand für alle ist kein Traum.' Nein, er ist es nicht, wenn wir nur wollen! Nicht in 100, nicht in 1000 Jahren, sondern morgen, morgen, nein, heute müssen wir wollen."

[151] "Das Heer der Drohnen schreit unaufhörlich: Arbeit, Arbeit, Arbeit kann uns nur retten! Und sie haben recht. Die Arbeit anderer kann sie, die Nichtstuer, nur retten."

[152] This is a term Paolo Freire uses in his influential *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970).

suggestions, by contrast, spans the entire arsenal of workers' resistance: general strike, sabotage, rejection of unemployment benefits, occupation of factories, etc. (*Der Syndikalist* 43/20).

What is at stake in this debate is a re-negotiation between work and citizenship (understood here not as ownership of a passport of a particular nation, but as the potentiality of agency in a given social group): the attempt to wrest energies away from waged work and restore them to a meaningful life beyond its confines. This debate, of course, is very much our own at the turn of the twenty-first century. In the anthology *Die Zukunft von Arbeit und Demokratie* (The Future of Work and Democracy, 2000), Ulrich Beck and others historicize the wage-form and propose the idea of an unconditional basic citizens' income (*Bürgergeld*) and new forms of work (*Bürgerarbeit*) in order to grant people greater freedom from the disciplining power of waged work (see especially the contributions by Beck, Meier, and Liessmann).[153] The authors' hope is to unearth creative potentials they call *ziviler Ungehorsam* (civil disobedience) – and the essay "...und was machen Sie so im Leben?" (...and what are you doing with your lives?) by a collective named *Die Glücklichen Arbeitslosen* (The Happy Unemployed) illustrates what this could amount to:

> The reason for unemployed people to be unhappy is not the fact that they do not have a job, but rather that they do not have money. We should therefore not speak of 'jobless', but of 'moneyless' in order to see things more clearly. The happy

[153] From Beck's perspective, alternative forms of work are a necessary precondition for a functioning democracy: "Wie wird Demokratie jenseits der Erwerbsarbeitsgesellschaft möglich? Meine Teilantwort: durch die breite Förderung von Bürgerarbeit. Bürgerarbeit meint: *doing democracy*. Man könnte auch (um Schumpeters Begriff der 'schöpferischen Zerstörung' zu variieren) von *schöpferischem Ungehorsam* sprechen." (Beck, p. 416)

> unemployed, as we shall see, aims to make up for this lack of money through her quest for resources yet to be defined. (Beck, 2000, p. 116)[154]

In many ways, the Weimar anti-authoritarian socialists are the ancestors of today's "happy unemployed." Like them, they refused to work in return for a wage which would have restricted them to be part of an economic system they strictly rejected. Like them, they wanted to establish social relations based on solidarity and mutuality (something the *Glücklichen Arbeitslosen* call *Ökonomie der Gegenseitigkeit* (economy of mutuality). And, to make the connection to art and literature, they wanted to wrest time and energy away from the world of work in search of new forms of creative behavior (*unklare Ressourcen*) that could hardly be measured by the conventions of bourgeois 'Art' and proletarian 'Production.'

HEINRICH VOGELER AND THE BARKENHOFF COMMUNE

Exodus from industrial modernity manifested itself most directly in small, intentional anarchic polities or communes. In his "Durch Absonderung zur Gemeinschaft" (Community through Withdrawal), Gustav Landauer argued that the state was not something which can be destroyed by revolution, but that it was a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of behavior. He concluded that once can destroy it only by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently. Based on this premise, anti-authoritarian socialists of all kinds refused to wait till the iron laws of

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[154] My translation. The original reads: "Wenn der Arbeitslose unglücklich ist, so liegt das nicht daran, daß er keine Arbeit hat, sondern daß er kein Geld hat. Also sollten wir nicht mehr von 'arbeitslos', sondern von 'geldlos', nicht mehr von 'Arbeitssuchenden', sondern von 'Geldsuchenden' reden, um die Dinge klarer zu stellen. Wir sehen werden, bietet der Glückliche Arbeitslose an, diesen Mangel durch die Suche nach unklaren Ressourcen auszugleichen."

history would allow for a revolutionary moment in Germany; instead, they attempted to implement a radically new way of life in small rural communities whose basic pillars were deeply at odds with industrial modernity: abolishment of private property and money, collective work with the goal of overcoming the division of labor, and an understanding of art aimed at creating a *Gesamtkunstwerk* composed of all activities and aspects of human life. As Harold Barclay notes in his recent book *Culture and Anarchism*, "[A]narchy correlates with 'folk' or *gemeinschaftlich* characteristics. It is easiest where the population of the maximal effective social group is small – probably up to two hundred individuals." (Barclay, p. 71) This practice – or: experiments, as they were usually refered to – was, however, extremely controversial within the anti-authoritarian camp. Despite their strong voluntaristic tendency, many anti-authoritarian socialists shared with other socialists a belief in the "ripening" of social relations that would lead to communism by necessity.

The best-known case was the *Barkenhoff-Siedlung* near Bremen, part artist colony, part agrarian commune. The painter Heinrich Vogeler started the commune in 1919 and donated it to a orphans' project after the failure of the experiment in 1924. Before that, however, the Barkenhoff received significant attention as a laboratory of an alternative way of life and attracted a lot of attention and temporary members such as the writers Friedrich Wolf and Rainer Maria Rilke or the painter Paula Modersohn-Becker. The charismatic Vogeler, who was affiliated with the KAPD before joining the Communist Party and emigrating to the Soviet Union in the mid-1920s, accompanied the practice at the Barkenhoff with several pamphlets promoting the project: *Siedlungswesen und Arbeitsschule* (Communes Movement and Vocational Schools, 1919), *Proletkult: Kunst und Kultur* (Proletkult: Art and Culture, 1919), and *Über den Expressionismus der*

Liebe (On the Expressionism of Love, 1918). Since Vogeler conceived of working in his commune very much in artistic terms, a brief outline of this theories will provide us with an ideal transition to anti-authoritarian socialist understandings of art and literature.

What Vogeler describes and promotes in his essays is a very rigidly organized collective that strives for greatest possible autonomy and autarchy. Initially, his model has a certain division of manual and intellectual labor among its population, whereby the manual workers create through their labor a surplus which frees up time for artistic activity for members with such inclinations and abilities. (*Siedlungswesen*, p. 9) The writer, for example, while being an organic part of the whole, performs the somewhat elevated task of organizing relations among members of the commune on top of his regular work schedule:

> The writer, who ought to have emerged from the midst of the workers, is involved in all aspects of communal work and deals also with the relationships among the people. He does so on the principle of mutual aid for the sake of the community; he helps keeping a clear social conscience and provides mental nourishment for all. (*Siedlungswesen*, p. 5)[155]

Ultimately, however, such divisions were to be fully eliminated. While communist discourse, as we have seen, found it impossible to reconcile the Renaissance ideal of a wholesome labor process with modern industrial labor, Vogeler is serious in turning back the clock to the often-cited workmanship of the Gothic period. (*Proletkult*, p. 4) Art, in this conception, is simply the creation of use values and, as a result, the bourgeois split between art and the people is sublated in the synthesis of folk art. (Here, it should be noted that Vogeler's term *völkische Kunst* (folk art) smacks of fascist

[155] "Der Schriftsteller, der möglichst aus der Arbeiterschaft hervorgegangen ist, kümmert sich um alle Arbeiten und um das Verhältnis der Menschen untereinander. Er richtet es aus im Sinne der gegenseitigen Hilfe, im Sinne der Gemeinschaft; das soziale Gewissen hält er rein und schafft der Hundertschaft geistige Nahrung."

terminology and that Nazi ideology also drew on pre-industrial and agrarian traditions in their glorification of Germanic labor, but that the term has no nationalist connotations in Vogeler's usage at all.)

However, Vogeler does not content himself by returning to older form of work(manship) and art(isanry). There are strong traces of Rousseau in his essays, an embrace of pre-industrial society that we have seen in other articles on work in *Der Syndikalist*. In *Proletkult: Kunst und Kultur*, Vogeler indeed goes as far as claiming that mankind would long for a return to nature (more precisely, for becoming an organic part of it). He writes:

> Cubism, like pure crystall growing out of chaos, built a new world of pure organic form. But this resorting back to last primitive forms only demonstrates the pressing desire of mankind to once again become a piece of nature, to purify humanity from everything that is secondary and accidental. (*Proletkult*, p. 9)[156]

Expressionism, for Vogeler, is the clearest indictment of modern alienation *and* the purest manifestation of the desire to become one with nature, although it should be noted that he views it as a cry for change rather than as the realization of de-alienated artistic creation. Still, the problem remains that Vogeler bases his theory on an understanding of nature grounded rather uncritically on Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid. As William Rasch has convincingly demonstrated a propos Brecht's anti-opera *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1929), it is one thing to historicize Hobbes' notion of the war of all against all (as a result of colonial conquest and the invention of property),

[156] "Der Kubismus baute, wie das reine Kristall, aus dem Chaos wachsend, eine neue Welt der organischen reinen Form. Doch dieses Zurückgreifen zu den letzten primitiven Formen versinnbildlicht nur die drängende Sehnsucht der Menschheit, selbst wieder ein Stück Natur zu werden, das einfach Menschliche von allen Einflüssen zufälliger Konjunkturen zu reinigen."

but still another to posit a concept of nature as fully at peace with itself. (Rasch, pp. 237-238) In any event, the report about the *Siedlungskonferenz* held at the *Barkenhoff* in 1921 featured the revealing formula *Ganz Deutschland ein Garten!* (All of Germany one big garden! *Der Syndikalist* 2/1921).

Fritz Kater, chief editor of *Der Syndikalist*, had little sympathy for such Romanticism. In his harsh critique, published in *Der Syndikalist* 31/1921, Kater argued that the *Siedlungsexperimente* would actually lead away from class struggle, rather than supporting it. He was especially weary of the labor intensity in communes such as the *Barkenhoff*, to which Friedrich Wolf also testified (in *Der Syndikalist* 37/1921, Wolf estimates to have worked ten to twelve hours daily). In this debate, the conflict within anti-authoritarian socialism between embrace and rejection of labor, between proletarian and Bohemian attitudes, found its clearest expression. And when the *Barkenhoff* got into financial trouble in 1923, there was no support structure to keep it alive.

BETWEEN THE ELITIST AND THE POPULAR: THE ROLE OF LITERATURE FOR ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN SOCIALISM

Moving now to the significance of literature for this debate – and, conversely, to the significance of this debate for literature – we need to recall once again the intricate relationship between the spheres of work and art. Depending on how narrowly or broadly we define them, we may either fail to see their connection or regard them as overlapping fields of human practices/activities. As we have seen, communist discourse attempted to unify these fields under the umbrella of productive, industrial work. The anti-authoritarian synthesis of work and art, by contrast, is complex and often contradictory, vacillating between an elitist understanding of art and one in which there is no need for it as a practice distinct from any other form of human activity and interaction. After our

preceding review of the discourse of work, it will not come as a surprise that a pre-industrial mode of production is seen as the necessary pre-condition for either of these conflicting understandings.

To a large extent, anti-authoritarian socialist meta-discourse and practice of art during the Weimar years was steeped in expressionism. This holds true not only for the early years of the Weimar Republic, when expressionism was still in vogue, but also after the mid-1920s, when New Objectivity had already replaced it as the dominant mode of expression in the arts and everyday life. Anti-authoritarian socialist art critics stayed at more than an arm-length also from the proletarian art which we have encountered in the first part of this study. Instead of regarding the artist as an engineer/designer, as in New Objectivity, or as an engineer/producer, as in proletarian culture, anti-authoritarian socialists often held on to the anachronism of the artist as chosen by a higher calling and of art as the organic reflection of the greater harmony of the universe and mankind.

> Let us forget for a few moments all the little concerns of everyday life, the personal miseries, the pleasures and pains of social life, and tenderly and cautiously withdraw into the vast and beautiful sphere of art. A sphere, believe me, that is sublime and generous, in which man can taste and feel the beauty and magnitude of the universe, where desires and sensual experiences know no boundaries, where everything is lordly, everything is true.[157]

This is how an unknown contributor to *Der Syndikalist* begins his article "Die Schönheit in Natur und Kunst" (Beauty in Nature and Art) in 1923 (week 18). There is no

[157] "Laßt uns für wenige Augenblicke die kleinen Dinge des täglichen Lebens, die persönlichen Verdrießlichkeiten, die Freuden und Leiden des sozialen Lebens vergessen und uns behutsam und gründlich in das so große und schöne Gebiet der Kunst entführen. Ein Gebiet, glaubt mir, gewaltig und freigebig, wo der Mensch die Schönheit und Größe des ganzen Weltalls ahnen und kosten kann, wo Leidenschaften und Empfindungen durch keine Schranke begrenzt werden, worin alles erhaben, alles Wahrheit ist."

reference to art as conditioned by socio-historical context, a context from which – according to the author – art has the capacity to wrest us, if only for a short while. With art being solely a kind of reproduction of the universe's supreme laws (*Die Wirklichkeit ist das Vorbild*), a true artist is one who has been chosen to fully understand these laws and render them in matter. And while only few possess the gift of superior vision necessary for their "priesthood" or "mission," the reader/beholder of the work of art is seen as an empty vessel (*aufnahmefähiger Behälter*) ready to be filled by it. In such a conception, the distinction between producers and consumers of art, which proletarian art challenged, is made to appear as eternal.

In accordance with their expressionist tendency, anti-authoritarian socialists flatly rejected art to be *Klassenkunst* (class art). The artist may serve as the herald of and for the *masses* – this term is often used in counter-distinction to *classes* – but s/he does so in his or her capacity as human being, and not as bourgeois or proletarian. In an article in *Der Syndikalist* (18/1921) that testifies to the blurring of lines between individualist anarchism and collectivist syndicalism, Karl Heinrich Weber states:

> What is art? The highest form of life, bordering on the eternal, reaching into the eternal. Life pulsing with the force of the lonely one. And the relationship of the lonely one, the artist with his environment, with human kind, with the universe? Deep roots within human kind, blazing flame that is nurtured by the many, flame in which all force, all desire burns. He speaks on behalf of thousands, embodies them [...] Therefore, art cannot be class art.[158]

[158] "Was ist Kunst? Höchst gesteigertes Leben bis an die Grenze des Ewigen und ins Ewige; Leben durchblutet mit der Kraft eines Einsamen. Und das Verhältnis dieses Einsamen, des Künstlers zur Umwelt, zur Menschheit, zum All? Tiefe Verwurzelung mit der Menschheit, emporlodernde Flamme, genährt von der Vielheit, Flamme, in der alle Kraft, alle Sehnsucht brennt. Er ist Fürsprecher für Tausende, zusammengeballte Verkörperung von Tausenden [...] Daher gibt es keine Klassenkunst."

By calling the artist *der Einsame* (the lonely one), Werner invokes Johst's expressionist play by the same title. This play of 1918 features an isolated artist of the bohemia and served the young Bertolt Brecht as a negative foil for his play *Baal*. This loner, almost by necessity a bourgeois, is now made by Werner to speak for his fellow men (*Vielheit* here would be best translated as 'the many'/ 'multitude'). How this relation comes about, however, remains entirely speculative. With art being denied any concern with concrete social matters, Werner is left with locating this relation between artist and multitude in the realm of metaphysics:

> Revolution is not made with the grey cells alone. Revolution in its purest essence is highest religion, born from the eternal freedom of the stars! This demand must be fulfilled most profoundly in revolutionary art![159]

This metaphysical understanding of art, however, coexists uneasily with an altogether different one in which art is seen simply as (the highest expression of) artisanal work. Again and again, the medieval artisan is cited as the ideal embodiment of the synthesis of use value and aesthetic value – an attempt to turn back the clock to a time prior to the development of bourgeois "affirmative culture" that, according to Ludwig Marcuse, is itself the result of the transition from *Werk* (work) into *Wert* (value).[160] After all, syndicalism initially arose as a movement of skilled craftsmen who saw their craft threatened by industrialization. That is how an unknown author (only the initials G.K. are indicated) can claim syndicalism and art to be inextricably linked. In his article

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[159] "Revolution wird nicht allein mit dem Hirnkasten gemacht. Revolution im reinsten Sinne ist höchste Religion, geboren aus der ewigen Freiheit der Sterne! Am tiefsten muß sich diese Forderung in der revolutionären Kunst abprägen!"

[160] See Marcuse's essay "Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur" of 1937.

"Syndikalismus und Kunst" (Syndicalism and Art, week 38/1920 of *Der Syndikalist*), he reviews an exhibit (*Arbeiter-Dilettanten-Kunstausstellung*) as a prime example of this linkage. Starting out by praising the initial sameness of work and art as creative activity – again, the term here is *Handwerkskunst* – the author then shifts to re-presentation, the mere illustration of the work process in his praise of Karl Rother's painting *Arbeit* (Work). Regarding Rother's painting *Totentanz*, the author even likens it to Wagner's *Ring*:

> Some reach the summit, but now the balancing act on the sword's blade begins and the fall into the abyss ensues – the tragedy of human kind in its hunt for gold. What the Nibelungen show us with the harrowing force of sound – here, a proletarian shows us in an image.[161]

Similarly contradictory is the 1923 article "Über die Stellung der Kunst in der Volkserziehung" (On the Significance of Art in the Education of a People) by the British school reformer Walter Crane (also published in *Der Syndikalist*, week 24/1923). Like the author of the previous article, Crane asserts on one hand that any human activity ought to be considered art. On the other hand, he reserves art for an exclusive portion of society by saying that "our demand, that such natural instincts ought to be cultivated, does not translate into the demand for a nation full of artists.[162]

The deeper reason for this confusion of radically popular and elitist understandings of art begins with the underlying assumption of nature as harmonious,

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[161] "Mancher erreicht den Gipfel, doch nun beginnt das Balanzieren über des Schwertes Schneide und der Sturz in die Tiefe – die Tragödie der Menschheit in ihrer Jagd nach dem Golde. Was uns die ‚Nibelungen' mit den Tönen der Musik in erschütternder Wucht geben – hier bringt es ein Proletarier im Bilde zum Ausdruck."

[162] "Aus der Forderung, solche natürliche [sic!] Instinkte zu kultivieren, folgt keineswegs, daß wir etwa eine Nation voller Künstler haben sollten."

rather than as a site of struggle. The argument, then, runs as follows: art is the transformation of matter into form. Since this matter, i.e., nature, is perfect in itself, art simply ought to reproduce its eternal laws. Since not everybody is capable of creating works of great beauty, the sphere of art proper is restricted to those born for it, with the usual addition that art could also be understood more broadly as everyone's creative activity. This latter conception, based on the assumption that the proletariat/multitude could not develop its own culture under capitalist hegemony (Rectors/Fähndrich, p. 73), is expressed very poignantly by the aforementioned Rudolf Grossmann/Pierre Ramus:

> In the free society of communist anarchy, art will cease to be the object of amusement of a philistine crowd. Instead, it will become a normal part of social work, whose products will become integral part of the everyday life of broad masses of people by becoming useful objects. (Ramus, p. 260)[163]

Similarly, Kropotkin had theorized a strong connection between work and art in *Brain Work and Manual Work*. He states:

> And how much the poet would gain in his feeling of the beauties of nature, how much better would he know the human heart, if he met the rising sun amidst the tillers of the soil, himself a tiller; if he fought against the storm with the sailors on board ship; if he knew the poetry of labour and rest, sorrow and joy, struggle and conquest! (Kropotkin, p. 407)

Not surprisingly, the literary practice of anti-authoritarian socialism shows up the same contradictions as the theories behind it: it is held together only by the opposition to

[163] "Darum wird in der freien Gesellschaft der kommunistischen Anarchie die Kunst aufhören, Gegenstand des Amüsements einer unkünstlerischen Menge zu sein, sie wird eine normale Betätigung der sozialen Arbeit, ihre Erzeugnisse finden Eingang in das alltägliche Leben der breiten Massen, deren Gebrauchsgegenstände werdend."

its mainstream and – to an even larger extent – communist counter-parts. On one hand, the expressionist tendencies of anti-authoritarian socialist literature are rather clearly opposed to the new proletarian forms of expression that communism supported. But, as we shall see, even the documentary literature was conceived in stark opposition to communism.

Let us begin by considering brief lyrical texts concerning work that were published on the pages of *Der Syndikalist*. The picture that emerges from these texts is all but uniform, although they follow a largely expressionist agenda, e.g. in the very conventionally expressionist poems "Die Arbeit" (Work) by Emile Verhaeren (based on a poem by Stefan Zweig), "Fabrikausgang" (Factory Gate) by Klara Müller, and "Mensch im Eisen" (Iron Man) by Heinrich Lersch. Verhaeren's poem uses expressionist pathos to further a Promethean understanding of work: here, the worker is seen as frantically and heroically driven to create:

> Triumphantly towards one single will:
> To affix the earthly seal, fiery and red,
> Onto the old universe's overwhelmed forehead.
> To dry rivers, move mountains,
> And create, on the seas and on land,
> All order from a new will.[164]

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164 Zu einem Willen siegreich angespannt:
Dem alten Weltall nur das Siegel irdischer Gewalten
Feurig und rot auf die besiegte Stirn zu drücken,
Flüsse zu trocknen, Berge zu verrücken,

The perspective is purely macrocosmic and the social dimension of work does not enter into it: work appears as fully autonomous, as the manifestation of a human drive. The language is expressionistic to the utmost degree, to the point at which there is no subject at all in the poem – it has dissolved into the expression of one single and universal "will."

Lersch's "Mensch im Eisen," despite its similarly timeless point of view, sees the worker as the victim of mankind's progressive aspirations. It is written in the first person and, by contrast with Verhaeren's poem, anchors the action in a subject that has, however, become an object. Although he uses the general designation *Mensch* rather than *Arbeiter*, Lersch stages the worker's machine-like qualities in starkest terms:

> I am reduced to a small human engine
> I, whose levers, whose arms whiz.
> I want to slit my veins with a knife
> But – steam spatters, no red blood.[165]

Und alle Ordnung, rings in Meer und Land,
Nach einem neuen Willen zu gestalten.

165 Nur noch ein kleiner Menschenkraftmotor
Bin ich, des Hebel, meine Arme flitzen.
Ich will die Adern mit dem Messer ritzen:
Dampf stößt statt roten Blutes Strahl hervor.

Since the worker in the poem has become a motor already, not even suicide is a possible way out of his misery – the worker's life-blood has been replaced with steam. The poem ends with the exhortation: "So schrei doch, Mensch im Eisen!" (Scream, man in iron!)

Whereas comparable communist texts would feature a concrete narrative solution – workers' ownership of the means of production – anti-authoritarian socialist texts usually end with affect: a scream, hatred for industrial modernity, bitter sarcasm, or more light-hearted irony. And here it is significant to point out that the heroes of the texts under discussion are almost always individual outsiders, not the collective, which is usually equated with the ignorant "masses." This is the situation in Klara Müller's "Fabrikausgang" (Factory Gate, published in the monthly supplement *Der Frauen-Bund* 6/1925) where down-trodden workers, with neither capacity nor desire to challenge the system, exit the factory with the only intention of returning the next morning, and where only two solitary workers have their minds set on bringing down the existing order. With characteristic expressionist pathos, the poem ends on a vague visionary note:

> Only two men, hammer in hand,
> turn their gazes and stare intently
> at the bosses' abundance, their pleasure hub,
> with the sparkle of hatred in their eyes.
> [...]
> While at the open horizon, darkened by storm,
> a blood-red sunset fades away. [166]

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166 Zwei Männer nur, den Hammer in der Hand,
hemmen den Blick und starren unverwandt
in all den Glast, der Freude goldenen Sitz;

This final image remains ambivalent, suspended between a new beginning ("open horizon") and violent ending ("blood-red sunset"). The text is clear only in its contrast between the two fierce workers and their passive and down-trodden fellow workers. Their loneliness is stylized as the necessary loneliness of the seer. In this regard, Müller follows some of the best-known texts of anti-authoritarian socialism, such as Ernst Toller's dramas *Masse Mensch* and *Die Maschinenstürmer*, where the pure revolutionary intentions of the individual hero clash with the ignorance of the working masses.

Two other poems employ humor in their effort to challenge the work ethic of the German working-class. Max Barthel's "Glückauf" (8/1925), is a rather sarcastic imitation of poems celebrating hard physical labor, in this case mining.

More than a hundred men, they went down
And emerge dead from their nightly black grave.
Tears roll down from children's eyes
Into glimmering, plentiful beakers.
A tragedy? The bosses take the loss.
Take, brothers, the hoe and do your shift.
And don't be afraid!
Good luck!

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aus ihren Augen zuckt des Hasses Blitz.
[...]
indes am freien Horizont verloht
sturmdunklen Blicks ein blutig Abendrot.

Good luck![167]

A similar poem was published on March 30, 1929, in the feuilleton of *Der Syndikalist*, namely the worker-poet Willi Schirp's "Segen der Arbeit" (The Blessing of Work). It is an emphatic praise of physical labor which, according to the author, gives meaning to every life (*Inhalt unserem Sein*). The poem, however, is not allowed to speak for itself. Instead, it is ridiculed by the paper's editors, who chose to add the subtitle "Der Mensch ist dumm" (Man is stupid) to the text. After the poem, we find the following annotation: "Solange sich die Menschheit von solchen 'Schriftstellern' verkohlen läßt, ist ihr allerdings nicht zu helfen!" (Human kind is lost as long as it allows itself to be fooled by such "poets.")

A number of things are of interest here for our purposes: first, the political orientation of the author Willi Schirp is left unclear. Due to the lack of revolutionary fervor, we can assume that Schirp was not a communist author and that his celebration of labor stems from the social democratic *Arbeitsmoral* which Walter Benjamin criticized so

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167 Űber hundert Mann, sie fuhren hinab
Und kommen als Tote aus nachtschwarzem Grab.
Aus Kinderaugen die Tränen entrollen
Wohl in die Becher, die schimmernd vollen.
Ein Unglück? Die Herren nehmens in Kauf.
Nehmt, Brüder, die Haue und macht eure Schicht.
Und fürchtet euch nicht!
Glückauf!
Glückauf!

sharply in his "Theses on History" (see especially thesis number six). But while we have seen so far that communists sought to set themselves off from social democrats very sharply, the anarcho-syndicalist paper often makes no distinction between the two large *Arbeiterparteien*. Secondly, *Der Syndikalist* offers a radical refutation of the 'dignity of labor' argument which was certainly more prevalent among social democrats, but – as we have seen – was wide-spread among communists as well. Finally, this attitude allowed the anti-authoritarian socialists a considerable distance from the debate about work (and from the 'working-class' itself) which manifests itself in the irony often to be found in their literary treatments of work.

The feuilleton *Beilage* of *Der Syndikalist* also frequently published short prose written by unknown contributors who often wrote under pseudonym. As opposed to the communist press, however, the use of pseudonyms was not primarily meant to protect the authors from persecution by the factory management, but instead to express a philosophical agenda – pseudonyms such as Diogenes, X.L. Uranus, Odysseus, or Jungblut clearly demonstrate their carriers' desire to place themselves outside of pragmatist and within utopian discourse. From such a perspective beyond party affiliations or even class solidarity, their literary texts that deal with work are rather eclectic in terms of form, often ironic in tone, and – maybe the main distinction to the communist texts discussed in chapter one – they lack dialectical resolve at the end. For example, a short, semi-fictional text like "Leuna!" which was published in 1923, at first does not appear very dissimilar from the ones written by worker-correspondents in *Die rote Fahne*. Like them, it is a somewhat stylized indictment of industrial working life under capitalism, mixing concrete details of location with expressionist abstractions of an apocalyptic world. What is striking, however, is that the word 'work' never appears

without being put in quotations marks (three times). The unknown author (only the abbreviation E.R. is indicated) does not call on the Leuna workers to take over the factory's production. Rather, his text asks whether the 'work' done at Leuna should continue to be done:

> This is the place where the premises for poison gas, brimstone, and acid are. Men are wasting away during 'work' already. And the finished 'work' brings about new murder. War will break out.[168]

Reminiscent of the expressionist Georg Kaiser's *Gas*, a thinly disguised allegory of the Leuna factory in which the world faces extinction due to a gigantic chemical explosion, but very different from the communist author Berta Lask's *Leuna 1921*, in which the ultimate goal remains the workers' taking possession of the factory, this short text ends in a call for a humanist utopia: "Oh, energy spent in vain, wasted day after day, but that could accomplish great things toward the true salvation of human kind."[169] As opposed to the communist exhortation of class solidarity, this text sharply criticizes the working masses as dumb and passive (*stumpf, blöde, teilnahmslos*). Finally, it makes a connection between factory and state which communist equivalents would have hardly made – given the strong orientation towards the central control over industry practiced in the Soviet Union.

And when a text like "Dortmund" – written by an author named "Diogenes" – does envision a future take-over of production by the worker, it remains an utterly

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[168] "Es ist die Stelle, wo die Gebäude für Giftgas, Schwefel und Säure stehen. Hier siechen Menschen schon bei der ‚Arbeit' hin. Und die fertige ‚Arbeit' bringt neuen Mord. Krieg wird entbrennen."

[169] "Oh, nutzlos vergeudete Kraft, die sich hier Tag für Tag aufreibt, und die doch Gewaltiges leisten könnte im Sinne wahrer Menschheitserlösung."

unconvincing narrative conclusion to a text that condemns heavy industry in the harshest terms possible. Its main plot may be an explosion in a coal mine which costs the lives of hundreds of workers – something that could have been avoided had the management acted on certain warning signs. However, Diogenes' critique goes much further by detailing the environmental destruction of the Ruhr valley and the health risks the workers are facing. From this perspective, it remains questionable at best that workers' control of the mines would make a significant difference. The Ruhr valley here is portrayed as "a terrible battlefield of heavy industry," and the "once beautiful Rhineland-Westphalia is blanketed with a thick layer of dust which it has cast upon it." Much more strongly than in comparable communist texts, the general opposition to industrial modernity which governs the text makes the ending seem tagged on rather artificially.

Like *Die rote Fahne*, *Der Syndikalist* also featured short instructional dialogues among workers in which a more experienced and activist worker convinces a younger colleague to join the ranks of syndicalist organizations. In "Der wißbegierige Fabriklehrling. Ein Zwiegespräch" (The Studious Apprentice. A Dialogue), written by "Jungblut" and published in August of 1921 in the supplement *Die junge Menschheit*, the character Max Jungblut persuades the younger apprentice Otto to turn his back on the trade unions and join FAUD (*Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands*). All the major elements of anti-authoritarian socialist – Jungblut refers to FAUD members explicitly as socialists – discourse on work are present here: rejection of social-democratic reformism and communist centralization, direct and spontaneous strikes and sabotage, reference to primitive *ur*-communism (e.g. Eskimo communes), the woes of the division of labor, and the theory of mutual aid. Jungblut even tells his younger colleague to go and read Kropotkin! Naturally, the strategy works, and Otto decides to follow suit: "Everything

you are telling me makes so much sense. I think I am also going to become a syndicalist. And I find it really nasty that the colleagues from the union always talk badly about you."[170] What is curious is that the same issue of *Die junge Menschheit* features a follow-up to the dialogue, M. X. Winkler's "Wie Otto seinem Bruder Karl Syndikalismus lehrt." Now it is Otto's turn to recruit new syndicalists, which he does by writing a letter, telling his brother about his colleague Max Jungblut, asking him to join FAUD, and by introducing him to the "secrets of the art of his craft."

Having considered these previously neglected texts from *Der Syndikalist*, I would argue that they hardly fulfill the metaphysical prescriptions of anti-authoritarian socialist meta-discourse on literature we have encountered above. Clearly, not all of the texts under discussion are expressionist; some, like the dialogue just mentioned, even have a very practical orientation towards social change via solidly rational discourse. It is true that the fundamental opposition to industrial modernity does not allow anti-authoritarian socialist authors to develop stringent alternative narrative solutions and that they, when trying to do so, do not convince. But it is not entirely true, as Rector and Fähnders argue, that "anarcho-syndicalists […] stylized the poet as prophet who is able to see the promised land of anarchism, while the masses are still oblivious to it." (Rector/Fähnders, p. 149) Again, the radically populist conception of art as craftsmanship, and of the literary text as promotional vehicle of this conception, makes for a more complex picture. This becomes even clearer when we now take a look at the literary activity in *Die Aktion*.

[170] "Ich finde alles so vernünftig, was du mir erzählst. Ich glaube, ich werde auch Syndikalist. Und ich finde es so häßlich, daß die Kollegen vom Zentralverband immer auf euch schimpfen."

THE PREISAUSSCHREIBEN IN *DIE AKTION*, 1923-1925

Let us consider now the 1923 literary competition (*Preisausschreiben)* in *Die Aktion*, to my mind clearly the most interesting instance of anti-authoritarian literary activity. In announcing the competition, Franz Pfemfert asked for contributions that would begin to constitute what he calls *Memoirenliteratur* – an archive of memoirs devoid of any "literary" ambitions. He demands qualities that we have encountered already in communist literary practice: simplicity, clarity, absence of stylization, focus on everyday life and struggles:

> Tell about your life, your thoughts and feelings, your awakening and your will. Forget about all bourgeois novels and novellas in your heads; try instead to speak simply and truthfully of those moments that are meaningful and instructive for our proletarian community.[171]

Recognizing the efficacy and longevity of the bourgeois literary heritage, Pfemfert calls on his readers to create a genuinely proletarian archive of memoirs that would be based on entirely different aesthetic criteria by comparison with its bourgeois precursor. What is more surprising, however, is that Pfemfert is even more explicit in his opposition to the nascent communist literature, which he – rather reductively, I might add – subsumes under the term *Proletkult*.

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[171] My translation. The original reads: "Erzählet euer Leben, euer Denken und Fühlen, euer Erwachen und euer Wollen. Vergesset dabei alle bürgerlichen Romane und Erzählungen, die in eurem Schädel sitzen, und bemüht euch, von jenen Momenten einfach und wahr zu sprechen, die für die proletarische Gemeinschaft bedeutungsvoll und lehrreich sind."

> I would like to make very clear that the goals of our literary contest have absolutely nothing in common with "Proletkult," i.e., with transporting bourgeois or (contrived) "proletarian" culture into the life sphere of the proletarian.[172]

Similar calls for contributions in the communist press always had the goal of creating a movement of worker authors, but that was not Pfemfert's main intention. Still, between 1923 and 1925, *Die Aktion* created a shared reading and writing practice by printing 57 anonymous contributions, which Fähnders and Rector call a "largely neglected source for the social and ideological disposition of proletarian members of left radicalism in the Weimar Republic." (Fähnders/Rector, p. 84) However, it is precisely the competition's lack of a collectivist agenda which makes them reach a rather harsh verdict: "The majority of reports made clear that the proletarian members of left radical organizations had not at all overcome petit-bourgeois cultural ideals; instead, they cemented them in a rather un-reflected manner." (Fähnders/Rector, p. 94)

From my perspective, the contributions deserve another look. Fähnders and Rector are certainly right by saying that most contributions lack a detailed account of the concrete work process. Judged by the standards of organized class struggle, this fact must appear as a total failure. Once we consider the anti-authoritarian opposition to industrial modernity, however, and do so in less condemnatory terms than the scholarship in the 1970s, the essays can be viewed as a rather multi-faceted archive of oppositional voices. It is precisely the fundamental rejection of industrial labor that makes it impossible for the authors to talk about it in a more detailed fashion. What arises instead is a conception

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[172] "Ich will, gerade an dieser Stelle, ausdrücklich betonen, daß das, was mit dem Preisausschreiben erreicht werden soll, nichts, gar nichts gemein hat mit dem "Proletkult", d.h., mit dem Tragen von bürgerlicher oder konstruiert "proletarischer" Kultur in die Welt des Proletariers."

of work that highlights exodus – in this case quite literally in form of biographies that are marked by an unwillingness to give up the mobile, migratory life of the artisan in exchange for the rigid disciplinary regime of the factory.

What emerges from those 57 texts amounts to a collective, male (only two contributors are female) biography of anti-authoritarian socialists born between 1880 and 1900. In broad strokes, this biography looks as follows: Born into a (sub)proletarian family with a significant number of children (often more than ten!); suffering from, and conflicts with, the overly authoritarian rule in family, school, and church, making anti-authoritarian socialism not least a product of staunch Wilhelmine authoritarianism; two possible reactions to 1914: either the welcoming of World War I as initial liberation from misery or, for those with an already developed political mind, utter disappointment and disillusionment with Social Democracy and its vote for the war funding (the so-called *Burgfrieden*); the horrific experience of war that was foundational for anti-authoritarian socialism; the hope for revolution in 1918/1919 and the joining of the Communist Party; disillusionment with the Communist Party and the Soviet Union; membership in the FAUD, the AAUE, another "free union," or rejection of organizational membership; refusal to obey to factory discipline in favor of frequent occupational changes and *Wanderschaft* (waltzing).

Since this summary is not an oversimplification, but indeed the compressed biography of the contributors to the *Preisausschreiben*, their emphasis on individuality does not necessarily contradict shared experiences. Since autobiography can be regarded as the prime genre of bourgeois individualism, it is easy to see how Rector and Fähnders would assign the authors a petit-bourgeois mindset. But more careful scrutiny yields a different result: a 're-functionalization' or re-working of the genre of great lives being

told by great men (with the leisure of doing so, or paying someone else to do so). Most contributors make perfectly clear that their lives are the products of social circumstances within class society rather than the sum total of individual choices. Contributor number 3, for example, speaks of himself as "eine Null im großen Deutschland" (a nothing in this great Germany), while others acknowledge being the result of unwanted pregnancy – hardly an appropriate beginning for a bourgeois autobiography for which purpose and destination ought to be the guiding principles.

I would then suggest that the 57 texts are not completely out of synch with the title under which each of them is published – *Materialien zur Erkenntnis des Klassenbewußtseins* (materials for the acquisition of class consciousness) – although their notion of class is significantly different from the communist one. The authors often directly address their *Klassengenossen* (class comrades), but by that term they mean mostly like-minded anti-authoritarian socialists, not all members of the industrial working class. Therefore, the anti-authoritarian critique and ridicule of the *Maschinenmenschen* is directed at the workers themselves, rather than at the system. Since many of the contributors had to start working in factories in their early teens, and associate the term *Maschinenmenschen* with both factories and the war, their resentment of industrialism is easily understandable, and is extended even to those over whose head industrial modernity had been slapped against their will (to borrow Max Weber's expression on the same matter).

The authors' unwillingness to make peace with industrial modernity and the forms of work it produces manifests itself in their kinds of "careers" they describe. A negative experience at the factory is usually followed by their decision to leave the steady employment and travel the country and, in some cases, the world. Of course, traveling

here does neither mean tourism nor the well-organized trips of German communists to the Soviet Union, but a form of pre-industrial traveling apprenticeship (*Wandergesellentum*). But while such an apprenticeship would normally imply the learning of one trade, the memoirs show their authors' desire for a multi-active life that has nothing but scorn not only for the division of labor, but also the older regime of specialization. Featuring a very high percentage of jacks of all trades, the 57 texts are therefore not only full of suffering from life at the margins, but also packed with descriptions of highly diverse activities and even adventure stories.

Considering the texts of the *Preisausschreiben* has shown that the anti-authoritarian socialists' embrace of a pre-industrial mode of production goes hand in hand with their critique of both bourgeois *and* proletarian modes of writing. In the following chapter, I seek to describe this constellation further through a discussion of the Latin America novels of the most successful anti-authoritarian socialist author at the time: the mysterious anti-authoritarian writer B. Traven.

Chapter 4: 'Unworking Civilization' – B. Traven's Writings about Mexico in the late 1920s and early 1930s

> "Oh, you beautiful, wonderful, old country, full of legends and songs! Mexico, there is no other like you on earth." (B. Traven, *The Cotton Pickers*)

By the mid-1920s, anti-authoritarian socialism had become ever more marginal. The membership of the largest federation of German unions, the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund,* had declined from 7,821,558 in 1922 to 4,182,445 in 1925, while the membership of the *Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands* (FAUD), the largest syndicalist union, had decreased even more sharply from 70 000 to 25 000 members during the same period. (Bock, p. 70) The *Siedlungsbewegung*, which had thrived mainly on anti-authoritarian socialist support, was fading, with its best-known utopian community, the Barkenhoff near Bremen, now operated by the communist IAH.[173] Its founder and leading figure, the painter Heinrich Vogeler, was by then a member of the KPD.

Under these circumstances, the anti-industrial sentiment of the anti-authoritarian socialists needed to shift the terrain away from Germany and its present realities: just like communists looked to an allegedly ultra-modern Soviet Union, anti-authoritarians turned to non-Western spaces, and to Mexico in particular, in search for pre-modern social alternatives to their homeland. Corollary to this move was a strengthening of elements that are sometimes presented as "primitivist" (they were, however, already present in

[173] The debate about *Siedlungsexperimente* in *Die Aktion* in 1921/1922 (main discussants: Lux, Titanus, Fritz Kater, Friedrich Wolf) appears to have been decisive in its harsh critique of utopian communities.

their agricultural orientation). Serving as a projection screen for German desires, Mexico became an imagined space where these desires for a life untainted by the ills of modernity could be lived out. And, where the supposed fullness of a pre-modern existence was under attack (or already gone), colonialism (i.e., Western modernity) could – again – be held responsible.

In this chapter, I will first give a brief outline of the role Mexico played in the anti-authoritarian imagination, which was fueled by several authors who emigrated there. I will then focus on B. Traven's eminently successful and very prolific writings about Mexico and demonstrate that his writings continued the anti-authoritarian critique of industrial labor and society at a time when institutional anti-authoritarianism in Germany was on life support. I will also make the argument that Traven's work can be interpreted as an attempt to find a literary form in sync with the embrace of pre-industrial society and indigenous and/or subaltern modes of existence and labor. Drawing on debates within Latin American Studies (e.g., about Magical Realism and *testimonio*), this argument will move our discussion beyond the terms set by the literary debates during the Weimar Republic while not losing sight of the fact that the search for alternatives to Western industrial modernity often tended/tends to reinscribe Western norms within binary oppositions.

Let us take a look at a first textual example of this amalgamation of anti-authoritarian socialism and anti-Western sentiments and its effects on conceptions of work. In 1928, the *Büchergilde Gutenberg* – a publisher devoted to make books affordable for working-class readers – published a collection of short stories under the title "Der Busch" (The Jungle). Among the narratives was B. Traven's short parable "Der Gross-Industrielle" (The Big Industrialist, but translated into English under the title "The

Conveyor Belt") which takes the reader to a small village named Tlacotepec in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. There, a crafty American businessman tries to convince an indigenous artisan to increase his production of small, artfully crafted baskets, and to sell them to him for a lower price. After a loose provisional agreement, the American cuts a deal with a New York chocolate company that wishes to sell a luxury chocolate line in the Mexican baskets – only to find out upon his return that the indigenous artisan has no desire to labor away at his baskets. Instead, he wishes to make them as uniquely and calmly as before the arrival of modern capitalism in the *gestalt* of the merchant from the United States. At the end of the story, the narrator makes an appearance and thereby authenticates the events he described: he claims to have met both the "Indian" and the American, who supposedly told him their respective versions of the story.

This story contains *in nucleo* almost all elements of the anti-authoritarian socialist discourse on work of the time. As we have seen in the previous chapter, anti-authoritarian socialism often countered the productivist logics and aesthetics of communism with its preference for the slowness of the artisanal mode of production. Related to that, the anarchist imagination flatly rejects the idea of waged labor, which is based on (and in turn necessitates) hierarchies of power that are incompatible with anti-authoritarian principles. The indigenous artisan, therefore, cannot accept working as an employee of the American businessman, and rather endures the material insecurity and humiliation he occasionally experiences in selling his baskets at the town's weekly market. In that way, he retains a high level of control over the quantity and quality he produces and is able to uphold the artistic standards he sets for himself. Even more importantly for this chapter, it is no accident that the story is set in "backward" Mexico, whose pre-industrial economy is being invaded by the interests of Western capitalism.

Furthermore, the aesthetics itself in which this discourse on work was expressed did not follow the fashion of the day (e.g. reportage), but instead returned to moral tales and other, older modes of story-telling which Walter Benjamin, in his 1936 essay "The Storyteller," has traced back to the two archaic representatives of the "resident tiller of the soil" and the "trading seaman." By assuming the role of the storyteller, rather than that of the reporter, an author like Traven chose a rather anachronistic narrative stance. For Benjamin, the storyteller belongs to a realm that had become nearly extinct with the advent of industrial capitalism:

> The actual extension of the realm of storytelling in its full historical breadth is inconceivable without the most intimate interpenetration of these two archaic types. Such an interpenetration was achieved particularly by the Middle Ages in their trade structure. The resident master craftsman and the traveling journeymen worked together in the same rooms; and every master had been a traveling journeyman before he settled down in his home town or somewhere else. If peasants and seamen were past masters of storytelling, the artisan class was its university. (Benjamin 2002, p. 144)

Benjamin's essay, itself a product of his critique of orthodox Marxism-Leninism that has a lot in common with the anti-authoritarian critique and therefore a text which we should not simply take at face-value, intimates that one needs to be mindful about the interrelations between a historical period's social organization and the narrative forms in which it tries to make sense of itself. In this context, it is highly significant that Traven claims to have met both protagonists of "Der Gross-Industrielle." He thereby suggests that his narrative stance is not the one of romancier but of a collector of testimony, a transmitter of oral (hi)stories. Again Benjamin:

> Thus, traces of the storyteller cling to a story the way the handprints of the potter cling to a clay vessel. Storytellers tend to begin their story with a presentation of the circumstances in which they themselves have learned what is to follow, unless they simply pass it off as their own experience. (Benjamin 2002, p. 149)

The question about the narrative forms in which certain experiences can be transmitted is, in our context, closely related to the question of the relationship between working and writing, between 'work' and the 'Work' – to use Scott Cutler Shershow's important distinction. In his *The Work & The Gift* (2000), Shershow has shown that much of the literary and artistic avant-garde during the 1920s, and across the political spectrum, wittingly or unwittingly bought into the celebration of (industrial and efficient) 'work' even when radically challenging the bourgeois conception of the cultural artifact as a 'Work.' (Shershow, pp. 172-173) By stark contrast, 'Unworking' (*désoeuvrement*), a term coined by Maurice Blanchot, stresses the imperfective (in the linguistic sense) and irreducible aspect of writing and living that can never be reduced to a final product of 'work' or the 'Work.' As Shershow explains,[174] this term provides an important critique of this entanglement of art and the imperatives of productivity that, as we have seen already in Traven's "Der Gross-Industrielle", anti-authoritarian socialism fervently attacked. As such, the concept lends itself well to anti-authoritarian socialist conceptions that, as we will see in the case of Traven, often aligned themselves with so-called "primitive" societies – societies which Jean-Luc Nancy has termed 'inoperative

[174] "Here again, in other words, is the same triangle of concerns (art, nationalism, and labor) that repeatedly emerges in the modernist avant-garde – no less in the overt nationalism of Italian Futurism and American New Deal art than in the overt negation of it in Dada, Situationism, and others. I will argue here that the thought of Maurice Blanchot allows us to cut through this fatal triangle, whose structure evidently unites discourses on both the Left and the Right." (Shershow, p. 195)

communities' that take place "not in a work that would bring it to completion…but in the unworking and as the unworking of all its works." (Shershow, p. 200)[175]

The concept of 'unworking', in other words, is well-suited for non-accumulative societies such as the ones Traven constructs in his novels. Like 'exodus' in the previous chapter, 'unworking' signifies an uncomfortable position for orthodox Marxism with its strong productivist agenda that has always had problems, as Michael Taussig rightly observed, with the co-existence in Latin America of modern and pre-modern elements.[176] The writings of the Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui, one of the leading Marxists in Latin America at the time, illustrate this combination of Marxism and *indigenismo* that the Comintern flatly rejected. (Liss, pp. 129-130; Caballero, pp. 25-62) Since Traven is rarely read in the context of labor debates, analyzing his works in this perspective opens up new ways of understanding his significance for the Weimar Republic, where his largest readership existed.

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[175] Nancy explains: "This is why community cannot arise from the domain of work. One does not produce it, one experiences or one is constituted by it as the experience of finitude. Community understood as a work or through its works would presuppose that the common being, as such, be objectifiable and producible (in sites, persons, buildings, discourses, institutions, symbols: in short, in subjects). Products derived from operations of this kind, however grandiose they might seek to be and sometimes manage to be, have no more communitarian existence than the plaster busts of Marianne. Community necessarily takes place in what Blanchot has called "unworking," referring to that which, before or beyond the work, withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do either with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension. Community is made of the interruption of singularities, or of the suspension that singular beings are. Community is not the work of singular beings, nor can it claim them as its works, just as communication is not a work or even an operation of singular beings, for community is simply their being – their being suspended upon its limit. Communication is the unworking of work that is social, economic, technical, and institutional." (Nancy, p. 31)

[176] See this discussion in Beverley, 1999, p. 9.

LATIN AMERICA IN THE GERMAN ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN SOCIALIST IMAGINARY

In their standard-bearing study of the literature of 'left radicalism' in Germany during the Weimar years, Fähnders and Rector dedicate only six pages to Ret Marut/B. Traven, and stop considering him with his emigration to Mexico in 1924. Given their institutional focus, it is logical to discount Traven due to his outsider status.[177] In my view, however, such compartmentalization does not do justice to the important role Traven began to play only after his emigration, when the readership of his popular novels exploded by comparison with the one of his rather obscure journal *Der Ziegelbrenner* that he published irregularly in Munich from 1917 to 1921.

Considering Traven's role in anti-authoritarian socialist discourse becomes even more important once we recognize that, after his departure from Germany, he gave up his early individualist Stirnerianism, for which Fähnders and Rector criticize him heavily, in favor of a more collectivist stance that resonated with a rather large and more diverse audience. Focusing on the representation of labor, I will show how Traven's writing about Mexico complemented the labor discourse outlined in the previous chapter – his characters are either uprooted jacks of all trades (similar to the authors of the testimonies in *Die Aktion*), or members of idealized pre-industrial village communes. We will also see, however, that this discourse is not without its contradictions.

Neither is the overall image of Latin America, and Mexico in particular, without contradictions in Germany during the 1920s. From affirmations of the "White Man's Burden" theory to eschatological desires kindled by the "New World," perceptions of Latin America varied greatly. From a cursory review of the literature from and about

[177] "Traven stand seit seiner Übersiedlung nach Lateinamerika weder in Verbindung mit dem organisieren Linksradikalismus bzw. Anarchismus noch in Beziehung zur Entstehung und theoretischen Fundierung der proletarisch-revolutionären Literatur in Deutschland." (Fähnders/Rector, p. 319)

Latin America, however, it becomes rather clear that the dominant strand was fueled by utopianism and/or "primitivism" that were, in turn, results of the discontent with modernity and "civilization" (Freud's book *Civilization and Discontent* was published in 1929).[178]

In this regard, Latin America provided the main space that could escape the two dominant alternatives of U.S. capitalism and Soviet industrial socialism – alternatives that, as has been demonstrated, had a lot in common when it comes to labor issues. And it was Mexico in particular that, due to its revolution from 1910 onward, captured the imagination of Germans for whom modernity's problems far outweighed its comforts. The list of intellectuals at the time whose search for anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism led them Mexico is long indeed: Aldous Huxley, John Reed, John Dos Passos, Upton Sinclair, Sergei Eisenstein, and André Breton – to name but a few.

The list of German writers is also substantial, although not as long as it would be after 1933: aside from Traven, German readers could consult authors such as Alfons Goldschmidt (*Auf den Spuren der Azteken*, 1926), Leo Matthias (*Ausflug nach Mexiko*, 1926), and Karl Reiche (*Kreuz und quer durch Mexiko*, 1930) for first-hand accounts from Mexico. As Lürbke rightly observes, the hopes these intellectuals projected onto Mexico need to be seen in the long tradition of writing about the Americas from Columbus' diaries onward. How else could statements such as the following by Malcolm Lowry be explained?

> ...we can see it [Mexico] as a kind of timeless symbol of the world on which we can place the Garden of Eden, the Tower of Bable and indeed anything else we please. It is paradisiacal: it is unquestionably infernal. It is, in fact, Mexico.[179]

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[178] For surveys on the topic, see Wolfgang Reif, *Zivilisationsfluch und literarische Wunschträume – Der exotistische Roman im ersten Viertel des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1975) and Anna Lürbke, *Mexikovisionen aus dem deutschen Exil* (Tübingen: Francke, 2000).

[179] quoted in Lürbke, p. 45.

Lowry's statement is typical for perceptions of the so-called "New World" because it simultaneously ascribes opposite qualities to it: Latin America is both heaven and hell, its inhabitants are both noble warriors and cowardly thieves. This dichotomous thinking is, as Tsvetan Todorov has shown in his 1982 *The Conquest of America*, already part and parcel of Columbus' thought.[180]

More concretely, Mexico was an important point of reference for two main groups during the Weimar Republic: environmentalists and leftists. Alfred Opitz situates the literature on Mexico in the context of early environmentalist thinking as embodied in the agenda of the *Kosmos Gesellschaft der Naturfreunde*, which shared basic philosophical assumptions with anti-authoritarian socialism. (Opitz, pp. 134-135) He also points out the central role of labor in this discourse. (Opitz, p. 144) The return to a simpler life, supposedly more in tune with nature, and to allegedly non-alienated forms of work was an important goal on the anti-authoritarian Left (e.g. the *Freilandbewegung*[181]) as well as on the Right with its ideology of blood and soil, although we ought to be mindful of their substantial differences.

But due to the socialist nature of the Mexican revolution, it was mostly the left that took a strong interest in this country, with B. Traven serving as the main transmitter.

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[180] See, for example, Todorov's discussion of Columbus' simultaneous belief that the indigenous people he encounters are both morally superior and rotten, extremely generous and simply thieves. Todorov concludes: "Of course, what is striking here is the fact Columbus finds, to characterize the Indians, only by adjectives of the good/wicked type, which in reality teach us nothing: not only because these qualities depend on the point of view adopted, but also because they correspond to specific states and not to stable characteristics, because they derive from the pragmatic estimate of a situation and not from the desire to know." (Todorov, p. 28)

[181] The most important figure of the *Freilandbewegung*, Silvio Gesell, had spent a substantial amount of his life in Argentina.

Newspapers such as *Die rote Fahne* and *Die Aktion*, for example, regularly featured news about the political progress made there. Despite the negative reception of Traven among official party critics, *Die rote Fahne* published part of Traven's *Der Wobbly*, entitled "Cafe La Aurora," on February 18, 1928 (of course, the fact that the title invokes the battleship that fired the shot to start the Russian Revolution must have helped Traven to get it published in the communist daily. However, the paper's editorial board prefaced Traven's story as probably *dick aufgetragen*, i.e., rather exaggerated). And the *Vorwärts*, the main organ of Social Democracy, published Traven's first Mexico novel, *The Cottonpickers* (*Die Baumwollpflücker*) in its entirety between June 21 and July 2 of 1925. Subsequently, the left-leaning *Büchergilde Gutenberg* (Berlin) and the *Buchmeister Verlag* (Leipzig) published, in quick succession, Traven's novels and travelogues from this extraordinarily prolific period: *Das Totenschiff* (The Death Ship, 1926), *Der Wobbly* (The Wobbly, 1926, a slightly changed version of *The Cottonpickers*), *Der Schatz der Sierra Madre* (The Treasure of the Sierra Madre, 1927), *Land des Frühlings* (The Land of Spring, 1928), *Der Busch* (The Jungle, 1928), *Die Brücke im Dschungel* (The Bridge in the Jungle, 1929), *Die weisse Rose* (The White Rose, 1929), *Der Karren* (The Cart, 1931), *Regierung* (Government, 1931), and *Der Marsch ins Reich der Caoba* (The March to the Empire of Mahogany, 1933) that was published by the already exiled *Büchergilde* in Prague.

Traven had arrived in Mexico in 1924 and found a labor movement that was stronger than its German counterpart at the time:

> In 1917, Mexico had emerged from the turmoil [of civil war] with the most advanced labor legislation of its time and a young and strong labor movement. Land reform was being introduced to satisfy the peasants' call for redistribution. To a new arrival with Traven's sympathies, it must have looked as if social justice had come to rule in Mexico. (Zogbaum, p. 4)

As Zogbaum further explains, however, Traven made the mistake of assuming the situation in and around Tampico to apply to all of Mexico. Other parts of the country, like Chiapas, were not affected by the progressive changes at the time, and only later would Traven turn his attention to the horrific labor conditions in the logging and mining businesses. At the same time, he came into close contact with the indigenous population which he, as we will see, would later stylize as *ur*-communist (he made trips to Chiapas in 1926, 1928, and 1929-1930). By the late 1920s, he had begun to realize that the progressive labor legislation had never reached large parts of the country, and had become thoroughly disillusioned with the Calles government which removed the initially favorable environment for anarcho-syndicalism. (Zogbaum, p. 106)

Traven's oeuvre not only presented a "great novelty" to German readers (Zogbaum, p. 23), it also reached a significant readership and created good revenue for the *Büchergilde* in particular. *Das Totenschiff*, for example, had sold 170 000 copies by 1931, and helped, along with other Traven novels, to increase the *Büchergilde*'s membership from eleven thousand to twenty-eight thousand in 1926 alone. (Zogbaum, p. 24) Zogbaum also cites a characteristic comment by a contemporary Traven reader who stated that "workers and unemployed alike adopted Traven as their writer because he did not lull them to sleep with dreams. He stirred them up and he kept urging them not to rely on their organizations but to have self-confidence."[182]

It was precisely this emphasis on self-reliance and mistrust in workers' organizations that awakened the scorn of communist party literary critics. Adam

[182] quoted in Zogbaum, p. 25.

Scharrer, in a 1932 review of Traven's work in *Die Linkskurve*, took the author to task for his alleged lack of class consciousness and lack of a rigorous dialectical materialism.

> Traven's writing bypasses the most urgent questions. Upon finishing his books, one wonders: what does he want? What does he have to say to the millions of sailors? Could not have his "Death Ship" just as well been published by Ullstein? Will Traven finally leap from Romanticism into reality? … One must hope that Traven does not stumble upon the Communist Manifesto. He might have a nervous breakdown."[183]

TALES OF UNWORKING: THE TREASURE OF THE SIERRA MADRE

What was it that made critics like Scharrer so extremely uneasy about Traven's success? I will begin answering this question by looking at the kind of characters, heroes and anti-heroes alike, who populate his early novels. First, since they appear in 're-functionalized' adventure novels that critically comment on the genre itself (Recknagel 1982, p. 182), they lack the idealism and strength afforded to most traditional adventure heroes. One would indeed even be hard pressed to argue that it is easy to identify with such down-trodden characters like Gales and Dobbs – they are busy surviving and their treatment of their fellow men and especially women is less than kind, to say the least.

Like the contributors to the *Preissausschreiben* in *Die Aktion*, they tend to jump from one trade into another, without longing for steady long-term employment. Moreover, the professions they "choose" do not lend themselves to easy unionization:

[183]"Traven schreibt an den brennenden Fragen flott – vorbei. Man legt das Buch aus der Hand und fragt sich: was will Traven? Was hat er den Millionen nicht-namenlosen Seeleuten zu sagen? Hätte „Das Totenschiff" nicht anstandslos im Verlag Ullstein erscheinen können? Wird Traven endlich den Sprung von der Romantik in die Wirklichkeit wagen? … Hoffentlich fällt Traven nicht einmal das „Kommunistische Manifest" in die Finger. Er könnte einen Nervenschock bekommen." (Scharrer in *Die Linkskurve* 3/1932)

seasonal workers in *Die Baumwollpflücker*, seamen in *Das Totenschiff*, or gold diggers in *Der Schatz der Sierra Madre*. Written during a phase of transition from Traven's early individual anarchism to a more politically attuned anti-authoritarian socialism and/or "anarcho-primitivism" (Murphy, p. 216), these novels can be read as novels of adventure (Keune 1987, Ertl 1976, Reinecke 1976) that have little regard for the kind of organized class struggle German communism had in mind. With Manfred Keune, we could say that adventure here does not further class struggle, but that "adventure becomes an end in itself, a form of being and not becoming" at the very peripheries of modernity. (Keune, p. 85)

In addition to that, Traven was heavily influenced by, and connected to, the IWW right from the start of his stay in Mexico (there was an IWW local in Tampico when Traven arrived there in 1924). In fact, the first version of *Die Baumwollpflücker* was named *Der Wobbly*. But the IWW, composed as it was of a potpourri of workers and unemployed and based on the full-fledged rejection of waged labor, was viewed less than favorably by both German Social Democracy and Communism. In *Die Baumwollpflücker*, for example, the opening presents a group of seasonal workers that quite clearly embodies the IWW's membership, i.e., marginal and migratory laborers. As Philip Jenkins has convincingly demonstrated, Traven manages in his early novels to provide a rather accurate account of the IWW's activities in the mid-1920s – a time when the organization was already in decline, but increasingly turned its attention to Latin America. Jenkins specifies his argument by arguing that Traven depicts the strategies of the "Western Wobblies:"

> The western United States shortly after 1900 was still very much a frontier territory, without the strict occupational or craft divisions which marked the East. A worker had to be able to turn his hand to anything, and he was likely to move rapidly between jobs. In this context, the only labor organization which made

> practical sense was that of the IWW—organization at the point of production, not on a craft basis. (Jenkins, p. 200)

Gale, the protagonist of *The Cottonpickers*, seeks employment as a cotton picker, baker, cowboy, and works on an oil-rig, with thoughts about Guatemala and Argentina constantly on his mind. He gets involved in one strike after another, all of which occur spontaneously on the spot without any sort of central union bureaucracy. Composed of employed and unemployed alike, with no regard for occupational or racial factions, the anarcho-syndicalist IWW we encounter in Traven's early novels was fundamentally at odds with Social Democratic and Communist conceptions of organized labor in Germany.

Moving on to aspects of literary form, I claim that Traven's formal choices are just as much out of step with the literary preferences of the large workers' parties as his understanding of work and class struggle. Let me explain why I believe the narrative construction itself of Traven's early novels to be fundamentally at odds with economic modernization and literary modernism. This, I would argue, is most apparent in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, a moral tale about greed, more precisely, about white men trying to exploit the land and the people of Mexico. I am using the word 'tale' very deliberately here, since the text is to a large extent composed of tales narrated among the various characters. Each of the three main tales is at least 20 pages long, interrupts the plot significantly, and provides self-reflexive commentary on the epistemology of storytelling. Although Traven wrote *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* early into his stay in Mexico, its textual fabric appears already indicative of the author's encounter with Latin America's narrative traditions.

The first of the three tales, "La Mina Agua Verde," is told by the seasoned gold digger Howard to his fellow Americans Dobbs and Curtin before embarking on their own gold expedition. Itself a parable about greed and self-destruction, the tale foreshadows the men's own fate upon finding gold: like in the parable, Dobbs will try to kill his partners in order to keep the entire fortune to himself. But the tale does much more than simply "give away" the ending: it can be interpreted as a negotiation between competing modes of telling stories to begin with. First of all, Howard claims to have been told the story by a friend of his named Harry Tilton, whom he eventually meets toward the end of the story. But the origins of this tale about a rich gold mine reach much farther back to a time "before any European knew a thing about America." (*Treasure*, p. 66) Aztecs and Tarascans, so the tale, had used the gold for centuries to make jewelry and for the (peaceful) purpose of worship, and the mine was located amidst beautiful mountains and near a lake with "emerald water" from which it received its name. Once the white colonizers start extracting the gold by making the indigenous and mestizo population perform the necessary hard labor, the mine reacts with a curse: white men die at the hands of indigenous people and/or landslides.

It is at this point in the tale that the listeners, Dobbs and Curtin, voice doubts about what Howard had in the beginning called a "real true story." (*Treasure*, p. 66)

> "All we have is a tale about it, but no proof." The other youngest said: "Right you are, mister. This happened anyhow a hundred and fifty years ago. What do we know about those ancient times? I say the same: there is no proof, and there never will be any proof." (*Treasure*, p. 72)

They doubt both the accuracy of the story as a whole – it is "just a tale" – and are particularly skeptical of its supernatural elements (the spell the natives have cast over the colonizers). But Howard, whom the narrative clearly portrays as the wisest among the

three protagonists, rejects their disbelief on both counts. Like all true storytellers, he has heard the story from a source worthy of trust, who has himself been part of the story. He has witnesses; all he does is relate their testimony.

In his "slow, convincing tone," Howard laconically states that "it was evident that the Indians had cursed the mine to revenge the tortures inflicted upon them for the possession of the mine." As Agua Verde stands in as *pars pro toto* for gold in general, Dobbs' and Curtins' doubts will be dispelled later in the book when they themselves succumb to its curse. In the narrative logic, then, "fact" and "proof" and "truth" are not at all opposed to the "supernatural" and the "superstitious;" rather, they are woven together into a non-Western conception of the world in which mythic elements still play an important role.

This becomes even more obvious in the third of the inserted long tales, namely the one about Catalina María de Rodríguez. After Howard starts telling the story with explanations of the cult of the Lady of Guadalupe and, at the same time, his characteristic claim to its truthfulness, Curtins interrupts him angrily:

> "That's all superstition. To hell with all those people who coin money out of the superstitions of the ignorant."

To which Howard responds:

> "I wonder … you have to believe, and then it will help you. It's the same with the Lord. If you believe in the Lord, then there is a Lord for you; if you don't believe in Him, there is no God for you – nobody who lights up the stars for you and directs the traffic in the heavens. Now … let's come to the plain story. I'm telling you that story just as it happened." (*Treasure*, p. 223)

Since Howard functions for the most part as Traven's alter ego and substitute storyteller, this response is quite remarkable. After all, Traven was strictly anti-clericalist and subscribed more generally to Marx's notion of religion as an "opiate of the masses." In the Latin American context, however, Traven has to make concessions in this respect: he cannot, on one hand, recover indigenous traditions without, at the same time, maintaining a purely secular and rationalistic outlook. Howard's position, to be sure, is more broadly spiritualist and animist, rather than religious – in fact, this third tale is laden with defamations of the Catholic church – but it espouses an opposition to a secular Western conception of the world that finds a narrative expression in the novel: not only will Howard eventually give up his quest for material riches; he will also make an exit from his own culture to live in an indigenous village. It has to be added, however, that Traven can only imagine him as the village's venerated governor. Due to Traven's reliance on dichotomous thinking, the indigenous population appears as passive and ready to be led by the white Howard.

The storyteller's return to a more mythic *Weltanschauung* goes hand in hand with a seemingly opposite impulse, namely that his tales are, first and foremost, useful. In Benjamin's conception, both aspects are closely aligned, with Johann Peter Hebel's *Schatzkästlein* as his prime example. All three tales are instructional *Gebrauchstexte* (texts for practical use) utterly uninterested in psychological realism. If Dobbs and Curtin were to have taken the tales' morals to heart, disaster could have been prevented. Art as pedagogy, of course, experienced an upsurge in the 1920s, as did the notion and practice of *Gebrauchsliteratur*. Interestingly enough, the German *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which was largely "responsible" for this upsurge, was initially also dubbed *Magischer Realismus* (Franz Roh), a term that then becomes prominent in the Latin American context (and is

dated back to the 1920s[184]). This is not to construct a tight connection between New Objectivity and Latin American Magical Realism (although the comparison may work on some minor level[185]), but to suggest ways to conceptualize the oxymoronic character of Traven's works. We can assume that Traven would subscribe to how Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, in his famous preface to his *The Kingdom of this World* (1949) – a novel about the Haitian Revolution – explained the phenomenon of Magical Realism in Latin America:

> Because of the virginity of the land, our upbringing, our ontology, the Faustian presence of the Indian and the black man, the revelation constituted by its recent discovery, its fecund racial mixing [mestizaje], America is far from using up its wealth of mythologies. After all, what is the entire history of America if not a chronicle of the marvelous real.[186]

In this regard, we could say that Traven seeks to avoid the total incommensurateness of leftist discourse and myth that Roland Barthes has diagnosed.[187]

One last thought about *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*: In both tales I discussed, the mining business is portrayed very negatively. And in both highly allegorical tales, potential parallels between gold mining and coal mining – let us not

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[184] Borges et al.

[185] See Parkinson Zamora/Faris, where Franz Roh's and Alejo Carpentier's notions of magical realism are compared.

[186] Carpentier finds the European avant-garde's attempts to conjure up surrealism in a thoroughly rationalized context ludicrous: "But clearly there is no excuse for poets and artists who preach sadism without practicing it, who admire the supermacho because of their own impotence, invoke ghosts without believing that they answer to incantations, who establish secret societies, literary sects, vaguely philosophical groups with saints and signs and arcane ends that are never reached, without being able to conceive of a valid mysticism or to abandon the most banal habits in order to bet their souls on the terrifying card of faith." (Parkinson Zamora/Faris, p. 86)

[187] In *Mythologies*, Barthes defines myth as "depoliticized speech" which, according to his view, resides mainly on the political right. Since the left would speak the rational "language of the producer," he views revolution and myth as antagonistic. (Barthes, p. 146)

forget that Traven writes first and foremost for a German proletarian readership – are hard to ignore. While indigenous culture, according to the narrative, had made use of the gold only to a very limited extent, the Western colonial-capitalist enterprise is shown as violating people and nature for the sake of large-scale extraction. The various mine disasters with which the native land strikes back again the Western intruders, I dare say, could have certainly been read by German industrial workers and coal miners quite viscerally and as criticism of the practice of German coal mining companies, as well as of coal mining in general. In any event, the book compares the non-accumulative, 'inoperative' indigenous community most favorably to the materialistic endeavors of Spanish colonizers and North American capitalists/imperialists. Therefore, it ought to be read as a critique of Western conceptions of work as – above all – productive and cumulative.

THE JUNGLE VERSUS WESTERN CIVILIZATION: *THE NIGHT VISITOR*

For an even clearer example of Carpentier's "marvelous real" (*lo real maravilloso*), let us now take a look at the 1928 text *The Night Visitor*, a text that, as many commentators have observed (Chankin 1975, Baumann 1976 & 1977, Goss 1987, Payne 1991), needs to be counted among Traven's most carefully composed works. This text evidences Traven's shift towards a more thorough investigation of indigenous culture. This shift creates a tension in the narrative between the American first-person narrator, Gales, and the environment in which he lives, namely "fifty acres of raw land located in dense tropical bush" somewhere in Mexico. (*Night Visitor*, p. 1) Eager to learn about and understand the indigenous cultures of the area, he nevertheless reenacts the genocide perpetrated by the colonizers: having discovered a pyramidal mausoleum

containing an embalmed corpse, his desire to "discover" ends in an act of destruction of the body.

The story can be viewed as a critical commentary on colonialism and a self-commentary on Traven's own literary practice, with both blending into one another. Obsessed with history, Gales loses the capacity to distinguish between the books he reads and the reality he encounters, switching positions in his dreams between being victim of colonial conquest and being colonizer himself who falls prey to sacrificial customs of ancient Mayan culture. When Gales tries to flee the jungle in the end, he instead merges with it, which seems to have been his ultimate goal to begin with. Indulging in the historiography of ancient cultures, i.e., in a linear conception of history, is his last defense mechanism before finally succumbing to "nature's" cyclical and eternal order. The story's last sentence reads: "The bush was singing its eternal song of stories, each story beginning with the last line of the story just ended." we could, with Donald O. Chankin, interpret this ending as Gales' return to the womb (Chankin, pp. 97-101), but I would add that this psychoanalytic reading needs to be plugged into the historical context with its intense eschatological and anti-modern hopes.

This eternal song of the jungle is indeed cyclical, not linear. Doctor Cranwell, Gales friend and fellow inhabitant of the jungle, provides a radical Rousseauean philosophy that articulates a veritable hatred of Western notions of civilization and progress.

> I am convinced that the world would likely be a hundred times better place to live in today if mankind had a chance now and then to discard all tradition and history and start fresh with no worn-out ideas, platitudes, and opinions to hamper the birth of an entirely new world. (*Night Visitor*, pp. 7-8)

Exhorting Gales to be "like God who destroys with His left hand what He created with His right" (*Night Visitor*, p. 7), Cranwell extends this critique first and foremost to book culture. We need to understand in this context that the written word assumes a central position only in post-Columbian Latin America, introducing an entirely new cultural regime – namely that of the colonizers who used the written word as a tool of reform, conversion, and domination – in short: of power.[188] Cranwell's remarks in *The Night Visitor*, I would argue, point precisely in that direction. As the author of numerous books, he claims to have destroyed each book after its completion.

> They've gone back to where they came from. Eternity, you know. I got full satisfaction out of my books in writing them ... Frequently I think how different our art, our writings, our techniques, our architectures, our achievements would be if, let's say, at the year sixteen-hundred-fifty, everything which man had made so far would have been destroyed, destroyed so thoroughly that no human would have been able to remember what a cart wheel had looked like, and whether the Venus of Milo had been a painting or a poem or a ship's keel, and whether democracies and monarchies had meant something to eat or were church bells. (*Night Visitor*, pp. 6-7)

This world view, which is both radically anti-modern and activist with strong Nietzschean traces (just think of Nietzsche's *Second Untimely Meditation*), is closely connected to the discourse of work. More precisely, it is an illustration of what I mean by 'unworking civilization' in the title of this chapter: both 'work' – the kind that is productive in the sense of raising productivity – and the 'Work' – the kind that aims at leaving a permanent mark of progressive culture/civilization – are rejected. The binary opposition on which this conception is premised, namely the one between a backward-looking and exhausted Western civilization and presentist indigenous culture that is in full accordance with the temporal order of the jungle (both cyclical and eternal), is of

[188] This issue is most famously discussed in Angel Rama's *The Lettered City* (*La Ciudad Letrada*) of 1984.

course a gross simplification that simply seeks an idealized Other of the Western world. In other words, Traven reinscribes the nature-culture dichotomy that he set out to call into question to begin with.

The clearest instance in the text of this clash of Western and indigenous worlds is Gales' encounter with a mysterious "Indian" whose description is a textbook example of the notion of the "edle Wilde" (noble savage).[189] Whether he is a real character or an imaginary reincarnation of the king whose embalmed corpse Gales has destroyed, this figure stands in any event for an imagined better world that can do without 'work' (imposed, waged) and 'Works' (books). The dialog reads as follows:

> "You know the history of your people astonishingly well, señor," I said. "Did you read it somewhere or learn it at a school?"
>
> "No, senor, I never read it. It was told to me by my father and uncle, and it had been told to them by their fathers, and so on back to the times when it happened."
>
> "Felling those iron-like trees and chopping them up and then making charcoal must be hard work," I said.
>
> "It surely is hard work, senor," he said. "Nonetheless, I like it. What is more, it is honest work, work we have done for thousands of years – ever since our god gave us fire. I can work alone, all by myself, without a master ordering me ... a thing I would not like. Here I can sit and think for days and months and years while watching those little snakes of smoke playing about like faraway music that comes and goes and comes again." (*Night Visitor*, p. 18)

It is no coincidence that the contrast between written and oral culture on one side and between the different conceptions of work on the other, appear side by side. In both fields, he appears as the defender of pre-modern practices (oral storytelling and pre-

[189] It seems significant that Traven portrays him as having a beard. As Andrei Markovits explains, the usual lack of facial hair among indigenous people was, for Germans and other Europeans, a sign of the lack of virility of a declining people. (Markovits, p. 41)

industrial unwaged work) whose existence is threatened by the onslaught of modernity of which Gales is still a part, albeit involuntarily so (and in that regard Gales could be seen as Traven's alter ego).

We cannot leave the story without reflecting again briefly on the question of genre. At first glance, there appears to be a contradiction between Traven's assertions about being a writer of nothing but documentaries (albeit in fictional form) and the strong element of the fantastic in *The Night Visitor*. What do we make of this co-existence of seemingly opposite narrative modalities? The answer, I suggest, lies outside of the realm of Weimar culture and might well be the result of the kind of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* (non-synchronicity) that Fredric Jameson assumes to lie at the heart of Magical Realism and, by extension, most of Second and Third World literary and cultural production. Very befittingly in our context, Jameson sees magical narratives flourishing

> in a transitional moment in which two distinct modes of production, or moments of socioeconomic development, coexist. Their antagonism is not yet articulated in terms of the struggle of social classes, so that its resolution can be projected in the form of a nostalgic (or less often, a Utopian) harmony. Our principal experience of such transitional moments is evidently that of an organic social order in the process of penetration and subversion, reorganization and rationalization, by nascent capitalism, yet still, for another long moment, coexisting with the latter. (Jameson 1981, p. 148)

This explanation would serve then as both an adequate plot description of *The Night Visitor* as well as it makes sense of its discursive methods. The rejection of Western notions of labor, progress, history, civilization, and rationalism interlock in the story's featured characters and its very texture. In the Soviet Union, where a similar level of non-

synchronous economic development took place, magical realist texts such as Platonov's peasant utopia *Chevengur* – a utopia in which "no one works but the sun" (Jameson 1994, p. 101) – were severely oppressed in the interest of a linear modernization theory.

INDIGENISMO VERSUS WESTERN CAPITALISM, *TESTIMONIO* VERSUS REPORTAGE: *DIE WEISSE ROSE*

Linking Traven's literary activity again to Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller," I would like to point out that an author Benjamin counts among the quintessential story-tellers, Charles Sealsfield (born as Karl Anton Postl in Austria), also wrote novels in and about Mexico. Like Traven, who fled Germany after the aborted Soviet Republic of Munich, Postl fled the Austrian restoration under Metternich in 1823. And like Traven, Postl/Sealsfield wrote a novel with the title *The White Rose*: *Tokeah, or the White Rose* from 1828, a novel that thematizes the onslaught of Western Civilization and the fight of the north-American indigenous population for survival, just like Traven's 1929 *The White Rose* is about the destruction of a Mexican farm through a United States oil company.

Before turning to this text, I would like to add a few theoretical reflections. In the scheme of Benjamin's essay, Sealsfield and Traven are the successors of the trading seamen whose story-telling capacities are facilitated through the encounter with the "resident tillers of the soil" of the Americas. Whereas Kisch's modern journalistic writing, as we have seen earlier, lent itself well for the celebration of industrial progress in the Soviet Union, Traven's story-telling talents appear to be more in tune with the pre-modern forms of work associated with Mexico's mostly rural indigenous population. It is certainly no coincidence that Benjamin's model storyteller, Nikolai Leskov, harbored a

strong resentment of industrial technology and regarded his practice as a "craft" rather than a "liberal art."[190]

I should also point out that Traven's novels were marketed as stories in the Benjaminian sense. For example, the 1930 edition of *Das Totenschiff* (The Death Ship) by the Leipzig *Buchmeisterverlag* quoted the writer Heinrich Hauser on its dust jacket as saying that "the man who wrote this knows his subject well. The beautiful thing about this book is that it is being told, not written."[191] Given the anti-Western, anti-modern impetus of anti-autoritarian socialism and its literary practice, I suggest to incorporate into our discussion the debate about testimonial literature within Subaltern Studies/Latin American Studies, intellectual formations that have tried to break with the kind of Eurocentrism which authors like Traven – although not always successfully – tried to challenge. The term 'subaltern' is particularly appropriate in this context since Gramsci developed it around 1930 with regard to the so-called 'Southern Question,' i.e., in theorizing the tension between Italy's industrialized North and the agrarian South. Preferring the term 'subaltern' to 'popular' mainly for reasons of censorship, it is clearly tied to the resistance of tradition to modernization/modernity. (Beverley 1999, p. 7)

Already at the end of the previous chapter, in the case of the literary competition in *Die Aktion* of 1923-1925, I stressed the importance of testimonial practice for anti-authoritarian socialism as a practice well suited for expressing subalternity. The contributors to the *Preisausschreiben*, of course, no matter how disenfranchised, were

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[190] "This craftsmanly art, storytelling, was moreover regarded as a craft by Leskov himself. "Writing," he says in one of his letters, "is to me no liberal art, but a craft." It cannot come as a surprise that he felt bonds with craftsmanship, but faced industrial technology as a stranger." (Benjamin 2002, 150)

[191] "[d]er Mann, der das geschrieben hat, kennt sich aus, und sein Buch ist schön, weil es eigentlich nicht geschrieben, sondern gesprochen ist." The editions of the *Büchergilde*, by contrast, were always plain, without illustrations or commentary.

still more or less familiar with the (Western) literary conventions of the day, and could give voice to their experiences in written form. In the Latin American context, by contrast, illiteracy predominated the time when Traven wrote (around 70% in the 1920s, see Lürbke, p. 42), and oral traditions had remained (and continue to remain) strong.

Therefore, the subaltern condition in Latin America often required (and continues to require) interlocutors, collectors of oral histories as transmitters of this condition in order to raise consciousness about subalternity. While this process of mediation is almost by necessity problematic and contested – a perfect illustration is the recent controversy around the testimony of Rigoberta Menchú – Traven, regardless of the many flaws we can find in his encounter with another culture, can be viewed as such a collector of oral histories. While the theory of *Erlebnisträger* – i.e., that Traven drew on the experience of one individual to whose testimony his novels would amount (Schmid, Baumann) – has been discounted within Traven scholarship, nobody disagrees with the view that Traven based his novels on multiple testimonies. Barry Carr points us in this direction:

> Traven was an indefatigable researcher and a good listener, and there was certainly no shortage of tales to be heard and transcribed; storytellling was ever present in the world of timber fellers and itinerant peddlers. Traven was in fact the first person to research the mahogany-logging trade and to publish his findings, albeit in fictional form. (Carr, p. xii)

I believe that Carr's characterization of Traven as a transcriber of stories is well taken and merits greater attention and care than it has received in the scholarship. It allows us to connect our earlier arguments about "storytelling" and Magical Realism to the genre of *testimonio*, since both harbour a strong link to oral traditions over against Western ones.

Let us start out with some extremely relevant questions with which Latin Americanist John Beverley begins his discussion of *testimonio*:

> Do social struggles give rise to new forms of literature, or is it more a question of the adequacy of their representation in existing narrative forms such as the short story and the novel […]? What happens when, as in the case of western Europe since the Renaissance, there has been a complicity between the rise of "literature" as a secular institution and the development of forms of colonial and imperialist oppression against which many of these struggles are directed? Are there experiences in the world today that would be betrayed or misrepresented by the forms of literature as we know it? (Beverley 1999, p. 29)

We have dealt with these questions from the beginning of this study, since the main literary debate on the left during the 1920s and early 1930s involved the issue of heritage and tradition, i.e., it revolved around the question of whether the new proletarian literature should imitate, or break with, bourgeois literature. This debate, however, that reached a level of very high intensity around 1930 and flared up again in the realism debate of 1938, set up the opposition between Reportage/"formalist" invention and the realist novel, excluding other, non-Western narrative options. It is my contention in this chapter that our understanding of the debates of the 1920s can benefit greatly from understanding not only the terms of the debates, but from being mindful of what they excluded.

By demanding, as Lukács and many other major critics did, first and foremost high literary quality from proletarian writers – by reasserting the "ideology of the aesthetic," to borrow an expression from Terry Eagleton – popular forms of expression largely fell by the wayside (although for example Brecht's theory and practice allowed for their incorporation to some extent). By and large, however, both sides of the argument

presupposed an elevated, vanguard role for the poet as the leader of a largely uneducated readership. What is it, though, that the people have to be educated about (and educated for)? What kind of people were they supposed to become? The findings from the first part of this study would suggest that either side of the argument was firmly based on the productivist ideology that was clearly dominant at the time and that demanded people (including authors) to become producers.[192] Testimony, in Beverley's definition, opens up a space outside and beyond the supposed opposites of the realism debate:

> By testimonio I mean a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a "life" or a significant life experience. Testimonio may include, but is not subsumed under, any of the following textual categories, some of which are conventionally considered literature, others not: autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, novela-testimonio, nonfiction novel, or "factographic" literature. (Beverley 1999, pp. 30-31)

While testimonio, in Beverley's definition, is written, and not acoustic, it is obviously based on oral (hi)stories, and as such often hard to distinguish from the storytelling practices Benjamin describes. Indeed, he uses Benjamin's essay as a point of departure for his discussion of testimonial literature.[193] His definition, therefore, is not yet complete without a further qualification Beverley makes elsewhere:

> Since, in many cases, the narrator is someone who is either functionally illiterate or, if literate, not a professional writer, the production of a testimonio often

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[192] Beverley rightly observes: "[…] we can observe in the cultural policies undertaken by the Soviet model of socialism the persistence of an ideology of the literary, which, apart from conjunctural differences, maintains a close affinity with bourgeois humanism and, in the case of socialist regimes in the Third World, with colonial or neocolonial cultural tastes." (Beverley 1993, p.12)

[193] See Beverley, 1993, p. 24.

> involves the tape recording and then the transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is an intellectual, journalist, or writer. (To recall the Russian formalist term, testimonio is a sort of skaz, a literary simulacrum of oral narrative). (Beverley 1993, pp. 70-71)

This hybrid genre rarely operates from a position of dominance or hegemony; it is usually a means of expressing a position of oppression and subalternity. Logically, debates about the genre have been most intense in Holocaust and Third World studies. Beverley even goes as far as calling *testimonio* the "narrative form of the multitude (in the same way the gospels were the narrative forms of early Christianity's resistance to empire)" (Beverley 1999, p. 9), with both gospels and testimonies as forms of bearing witness to oppression.

Storytelling and testimonial practices are intimately connected: orality is the "stuff" of which they are made. As opposed to written discourse, which tends to be connected to the realm of officialdom and power, both are popular forms: they are (hi)stories from below. But Traven's literary practice is in a predicament: the problem here is that Traven is himself part of the processes of *Verschriftlichung* that his texts seem to lament. Whether he likes it or not, his books fixate and objectify Latin American oral traditions in the same manner as the doctor's library does in *The Night Visitor*.

But would we not have to insist on greater historical veracity that, as we have seen, is not the prime focus of Traven's texts? Would the label 'testimony' not demand historical truthfulness? According to Beverley, historical veracity is not at all the prime focus of testimony. Taking issue with Robert Stoll's criticism of Nobel prize-winner Rigoberta Menchú on the grounds of historical accuracy, Beverley argues that testimony, as opposed to the essentially bourgeois genre of autobiography, is not bound to facticity, but rather to a truthful rendering of a collective biography of an oppressed people.

(Beverley 1999, pp. 81-82) In this case, "truth" may even include a sense of the fantastic which, again, connects our discussion back to Magical Realism.

Traven's novel *Die weisse Rose*, I argue, juxtaposes indigenous and Western culture and, correspondingly, testimony and reportage. It is high time, however, to preclude an overly simplistic view on social and literary matters that would reiterate certain mistakes made by well-minded Europeans like Traven traveling to, or living in, Latin America in the 1920s and 1930s. According to Rodolfo Stavenhagen's important intervention of 1966 in theories of modernization, development, and dependency, there are seven main errors in thinking about Latin America. The first and most important, he argues, is to think of Latin American societies as dual:

> The first, the "archaic society", has its origins in the colonial epoch, (or perhaps earlier), and preserves many ancient cultural and social elements. It changes little, or does so very slowly. At any rate, changes are not internally generated, but are imposed upon it by the modern society. The other society, the "modern" one, is oriented towards change; it generates within itself its own transformations and is the focal point of economic development, whereas the "archaic" society constitutes an obstacle to such development. (Stavenhagen, p. 26)

This duality is also the basic structuring principle of Traven's *Die Weisse Rose* of 1929, yet another embrace of what I have, with Nancy, called 'inoperative community.' Stavenhagen calls this thesis about the dual society erroneous because, according to his account, such a division completely misses the point of the economic realities of colonial and post-colonial societies. As he explains, the alleged oppositions have to be seen within a "single historical process" that started to bring them into a "functional whole" from the very beginning of colonial rule, rendering the most remote parts of Latin America a part of the world market – or, the 'world system,' to cite a theory to which Stavenhagen has

contributed.[194] Citing the "search and control of cheap labor for the colonial enterprises" as the driving force of this historical process, Stavenhagen claims:

> The "feudal" economy, if it ever really existed, was subsidiary to the dynamic centers – the mines, and export agriculture – which, in turn, responded to the needs of the colonial metropolis. (Stavenhagen, p. 27)

In conjuring up an indigenous community virtually untainted by the fallacies of civilization, Traven shows little interest in the socio-economic realities of the 1920s, even though he was well aware of them.[195] The White Rose, a hacienda whose name signals an innocence that clashes with its aggressive antagonist, the U.S. oil company Condor, has all the features that would suggest complete independence from the larger economy: affluence, but little to no accumulation; exclusive focus on agriculture; no clear division of labor that is instead non-alienated and in sync with nature and its cycles; almost full autarky; hardly any differences in wealth among its members; and hereditary patrimonial rule (*compadrismo*). Jacinto Yañez, the compadre who refuses to sell the hacienda because the money offered by Condor means nothing to him, and whom Condor will eventually kill in order to claim the land, experiences life on the hacienda as an eternal symphony:

> Every noise, every tear, the lowing of the cattle, the grunting of the pigs, the crackling of the chickens, the crowing of the roosters, the gobbling of the turkeys,

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[194] Like the theoreticians of the 'world system' (such as Andre Gunder Frank and Immanuel Wallerstein), Stavenhagen argues against the prophets of the free market that the market will never remove, but is rather responsible for, systemic underdevelopment in the Third World (and elsewhere). Andre Gunder Frank states: "I believe … that it is capitalism, both world and national, which produced underdevelopment in the past and which still generates underdevelopment in the present." (Gunder Frank, p. 1)

[195] Zogbaum's study clearly shows how meticulous Traven proceeded in his research before writing his books.

> the shouting of the children, the whimpering of the infants, the occasional barking of the dog, the flapping of the tortillas in the huts, the buzzing of the flies, the gossip and chatter of the women in the kitchen, the cursing and abjurations of Margarito as he tended to the mules, the squeaking of the cabin door opening just then, the sobbing of a youngster whose mother bad boxed him soundly around the ears because he had smashed a jug, the call of an Indian away off in the fields, the chirping of the locusts and crickets, the soft soughing of the sun-shafted blue air above him -- all these blended for him into a single song, the eternal song of a Mexican hacienda. Here it was the inimitable song of the White Rose. (*White Rose,* p. 24-25)

Could Traven really have found such a hacienda in Mexico at the time? Certainly not. When measuring the White Rose against the Mexican realties of the 1920s, it has to be noted first that a hacienda is itself a colonial social form that had itself substituted more ancient forms of social organization:

> The real Mexican hacienda was essentially a colonial or neocolonial form of land ownership, of large-scale (latifundio) agricultural production and management throughout Latin America … it has to be differentiated from the callpulli, which indeed is family-based, but also from the rancho on the one hand and the ejido on the other. (Seibert, p. 164)

While the *ejido* was the form the Mexican agrarian reforms in part tried to re-establish, Traven ignored such distinctions and their historical contexts for the sake of a clear-cut opposition between a historically concrete U.S. capitalism and a timeless paradise. Clearly, such a distinction relates back to what I called 'exodus' in the previous chapter, as it is employed with the intention of calling for a total flight from industrial modernity. Seibert speaks of congruence between the "withdrawal from capitalism" and the "withdrawal from history" that was prefigured already in Landauer's writings and practiced in the various "social island communities" such as the *Barkenhoff*:

> There was also an escape from the present historical stage of civilization and rule over nature, resulting from a desire for simple, intelligible structures. They hold the promise to revoke the powerlessness of the individual and his feeling that his fate is determined by outside forces. (Seibert, p. 168)

Socialism as a return to the soil – nothing could be further from the dominant thinking of Marxism-Leninism at the time, as we have seen in the first two chapters. And yet, the story is more complicated and muddled than that: just as the communist labor discourse vacillated between wholesale rejection and celebration of industrialization (with the latter clearly having the upper hand), anti-authoritarians like Traven occasionally lapsed into techno-utopianism. As was the case with texts by communist authors, the resolve of this tension is hardly convincing. In Traven's case, the attempt to reconcile his embrace of *indigenismo* with his Western background indeed brings out most clearly his indebtedness to colonial thinking, making him, in Anna Lürbke's words, both a critic and prisoner of Eurocentric thinking. (Lürbke, p. 96) After having essentially re-told Marx's account of alienation, i.e., the transformation of small landholders into industrial "free" laborers, and with the narrative structure and voice leaving no doubt about how regrettable this transformation is, chapter 18 of *Die weisse Rose* presents a stunning turn of perspective. Now that the engineers of Condor have taken over the hacienda and prepare for the drilling to begin, the narrator states:

> The teller of this tale has no intention of producing false sentimentality and achieving impressive effects so that the reader can speak of a pretty, touching story about the plucking of a fair white rose. So it has to be said, in keeping with the truth, that not only the engineers, but also the Condor directors, helped the former inhabitants of the hacienda, at least in the material sense, to suffer the loss of their native soil with less distress. Furthermore, the truth requires us to say that many of the men, if perhaps not every one of them, became so well accustomed to the new circumstances within a few weeks that they were hardly ready yet to swap their new life that quickly for the earlier one. They all were wearing good

> clothing and new shoes and boots, even the women. All the children were going to school, and the women were not working as hard as before. And all the people, without exeption, especially the children, were following better rules of hygiene ... They became aware of the first stirrings of the thought that all men on earth are one, that everyone is part of a great brotherhood. (*White Rose*, pp. 193-194)

It is certainly possible to laud Traven for having introduced a "second narrative voice" that complicates the idyllic picture presented to us by the first (Baumann, p. 27), and it would surely be wrong to complain about greater complexity in a novel. However, chapter 18 remains entirely *unvermittelt* (unrelated) to the rest of the book and is immediately contradicted by the dire analysis of chapters 19 and 20,[196] the novel's last chapters, where once again the indigenous population appears as the victim of the onslaught of industrialization.

So, the question remains: what made Traven "risk a break in the overall conception of the novel?" (Seibert, p. 175) I would argue that, in performing a similar narrative stunt as the communist authors dealing with industrial topics, Traven simply made a concession to his German audience that, after all, was composed largely of members of the working-class for whom anti-modernism alone could hardly provide a message of hope. In fact, we know that the *Büchergilde* pressured Traven more than once to abstain from too harsh a critique of labor unions, as it could alienate its members and readers. (Zogbaum, p. 130) And neither was chapter 18 of *Die weisse Rose* Traven's first

[196] After Rose Blanca has become "lots 119 to 176," we read: "Licenses were not respected, contracts were not observed. Right and wrong vanished. Whatever could not be gained voluntarily was exacted by murder, robbery, and kidnapping. The Mexican, ever obliging, did what the companies wanted. He fought with his brothers while the sneering foreign magnate calmly stripped from his body his last tattered shirt." (*White Rose*, pp. 205-206)

call for the industrialization of Latin America.[197] Far from providing or following a succinct theory of agricultural socialism, Traven was interested in keeping his work open to multiple readerships on the German left. The tension between pre- and ultra-modern conceptions of regress/progress remained, and continues to remain, a contested field of force on the German left.

Finally, and more troubling, Traven suggests to his German readers that the Westernization of Rosa Blanca, despite its flawed implementation, is necessary in order to turn its inhabitants into fully human subjects, hence re-inscribing the primitive/civilized binary.[198] Now Western culture is suddenly welcomed:

> They listened to the radios brought into the camps by the American engineers and oil people. They heard music and words from other lands, heard the speeches of the President of the Republic, heard the lectures of doctors, teachers, instructors, artists, health inspectors – of all those people who were the bearers of culture, knowledge, and advice, into the most remote regions of the nation. (*White Rose*, p. 194)

As is evident from this passage, the unexpected (and soon to be refuted) embrace of Western culture includes also an affirmation of the nation state, which makes this passage even more improbable for a Traven text. Such textual ruptures, whether we view them as productive markers of complexity or outright inconsistencies, seem to emanate

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[197] In 1925, Traven made the following statement: "I know no other country where the preconditions for large-scale industry are better than in Mexico" and demanded it implementation. (quoted in Zogbaum, p. 51)

[198] This binary has been a dominant figure in Latin American thought at least since Argentine Domingo Sarmiento's 1845 book *Facundo – Civilization and Barbarism* that operates (in the Argentine context) within the same interpretive frame that Stavenhagen critiques.

from the complicated composition of Traven's readership on the German left, which went even beyond the already heterogeneous anti-authoritarian socialist camp.[199]

Let us now turn our attention to how Traven conveys this story of Rosa Blanca's "defloration" to us. The most striking narrative feature in the novel is the plot's bifurcation: one part is centered on Mr. Collins, the owner of the Condor Oil Company. Characteristic for this part are the many narrative excursions that explain how Collins rose to executive power by means of most ruthless business methods. Such accounts of American businessmen were quite popular on the German Left at the time, with Brecht's Pierpont Mauler (modeled after J.P. Morgan) from *St. Joan of the Stockyards* (1930) as the best-known example. The narrative style of this part is "modern:" factual, in the style of German reportage novels of the day, employing the "headline style of newspapers" (Seibert, p. 173), making it most difficult to follow the many side-plots and highly complicated and abstract ways in which Collins plays the stock market (and the stock market itself can be seen as the ultimate metaphor for the abstraction of the modern world[200]).

While employing in part the language of the newspaper, the text shows nothing but scorn for journalism. After the newspapers have proven to be a willing instrument of Collins' trickery, the narrative voice comments sarcastically:

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[199] Seibert comes to a similar conclusion: "The use of different ideological elements makes Traven's work acceptable for many. It is possible that this – and not his "exoticism," as Scharrer thought – is one of the reasons for Traven's success during the last years of the Weimar Republic." (Seibert, p. 176)

[200] Traven exposes the irrationality of the just-crashed stock market in the following way: "It rips to tatters this pretty economic system allegedly devised and ordained by God. And yet all values remain the same. The values haven't changed. There is just as much coal as there ever was. The money is all there; not one cent has spun off the earth into space, where it can never be fished up again. All the houses are still standing. Forests. Waterfalls. Oceans. Ships and railroads are still intact. And hundreds of thousands of healthy, vigorous people are willing to work and produce and increase the earth's existing wealth." (*White Rose*, p. 87)

> That is why the newspaper is God's earthly instrument, the scourge of liars and all corrupters of the people, of agitators, Jews, conspirators, foreigners, and European immigrants who, filled full of anarchistic and similar pacifistic ideas, alight on the shores of our beautiful land to contaminate and destroy our glorious republic." (*White Rose*, p. 80-81)

The other part, by contrast, is related to us as a simple tale that, as Seibert rightly points out, is reminiscent of the "narrative style of oral traditions" (Seibert, p. 173) in which Traven tried to immerse himself. Viewed in this light, he could be seen as an interlocutor of subalterns who made voices heard that would otherwise have remained silent and silenced. Like in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, the insertion of legends is a key structuring principle aimed at relating tradition in a way neither the modern bourgeois novel, nor the contemporary *Reportage(roman)* could. Most important in this context is the *corrido*, the ancient song of the hacienda. It is not cited in its entirety – it is said to have more than 120 stanzas – but serves as one of the main markers of tradition as it is passed on from generation to generation. At the same time, it also serves as a flash-forward to the betrayal of the natives:

> After this earthly lapses he sings along again without noticeable dissonance in a calm and melodious way about the beautiful Indian maid who was seduced and deceived by a proud Mexican in a red hat, on a fiery white charger. Discordant notes are foreign to Margarito. Everything goes together, and everything is in harmony." (*White Rose*, p. 22)

Using legends and songs, Traven attempts to imitate forms of orality and collective work on the textual level. Like the case of the hacienda as a form of social organization, however, the case of the *corrido* as a narrative form is more complicated

than Traven leads us to believe. The *corrido* stems from Spanish, not pre-Columbian, literary traditions reaching back to the Baroque, and became a popular form of oral storytelling in Mexico only in the 19th century. Raymund Paredes explains:

> A Mexican ballad form related to the Spanish romance, the corrido (from the Spanish verb "to run") served a function similar to that of the blues in African American culture. Together, the hundreds of Mexican American corridos constitute an informal social and cultural history of the community, related largely from the point of view of working people.[201]

Paredes clearly shows that the corrido was a narrative form primarily used by Mexicans (i.e., mestizos, not indigenous people). Traven, consciously or not, clearly plays down historical complexities in order to conjure up a straight-forward opposition between indigenous and Western cultures and traditions. And this opposition, I should add, is not least one between literacy and orality.

Related to that, the narrative voice stresses again and again the correlation between narrating and working, just as Benjamin will in his essay a few years later. Rejecting the introduction of new machinery on the hacienda, the narrator states:

> The handmill wasn't life of laughter. With the use of the handmill it would have been impossible for the wife to tell her husband, when he came home from work, all the comical incidents that happened while she was grinding corn. (*White Rose*, p. 24)

Working and storytelling appear as two complementary crafts whose sine qua non is repetitive work that is not yet performed in return for a wage. The inhabitants of Rosa Blanca refuse to work – for better pay – on the nearby oil fields by saying that it was "[J]ust work, and never any fun" (*White Rose*, p. 29) there. Rosa Blanca has neither a

[201] See his article "Teaching Chicano Literature." Georgetown University. Accessed March 5, 2008. <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/bassr/heath/syllabuild/courses/paredes.html>.

clear division of labor, nor one between work and leisure time. Its people do not have to "make a living." One of the main images of the novel is an old broken wheel that has been waiting to be fixed for generations, but has instead remained by the side of the road as a marker of the passage of time and generations. Indulging in the *dolce far niente*, nobody on the hacienda feels a particular need to repair it. According to Benjamin, it is precisely the slowness of and boredom experienced during much of artisanal work that creates the ground for storytelling. Using as an example the very weaving and spinning that Rosa Blanca refuses to replace with newer machinery, he writes:

> If sleep is the apogee of physical relaxation, boredom is the apogee of mental relaxation. Boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience. A rustling of leaves drives him away. His nesting places – the activities that are intimately associated with boredom – are already extinct in the cities and are declining in the country as well. With this, the gift for listening is lost and the community of listeners disappears. For storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to. The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply what he listens to is impressed upon his memory. (Benjamin, 2002, p. 149)

I would conclude that Traven, in the texts I have discussed in this chapter as well in texts I had to leave out, seeks to recreate Benjamin's "lost" world of oral and communal storytelling in an effort to promote an anti-authoritarian socialist *Weltanschauung*. The opposition to modernity, history, linear progress, book culture, organized class struggle, and waged labor (and the respective embrace of indigenous traditions, eternal presence, cyclicality, orality, spontaneous wildcat strikes, and craftsmanship) finds expression in literary modalities that – at least in part – try to build on native traditions. These discursive traditions Traven employs – besides the pre-

industrial nature of Benjamin's storytelling, I discussed the mythological underpinnings of Magical Realism and the oral roots of *testimonio* – all contribute to a thorough critique of modern conception of 'work' and the literary 'Work.' The desire for 'unworking' in the arenas of labor and literature was a characteristic feature of anti-authoritarian socialism during the Weimar years, and Traven's novels continued to articulate this desire at a time when anti-authoritarian socialism played a very marginal role in Germany. In this context, the notion of 'exodus' takes on a quite literal meaning: anti-authoritarian socialist discourse evacuated the battlegrounds of Western industrial modernity and found fertile grounds for its ideas in areas where the world economy's uneven development had preserved pre-industrial pockets. Traven, who had to flee Germany shortly after the aborted Munich *Räterepublik*, was one of the first German exiles who came to Mexico. Roughly a decade after his arrival, when modernity was on its way to its greatest catastrophe in Germany, many more were to follow.

Conclusion

In this study, I have tried to accomplish mainly four things that – from my perspective – contribute something new to existing scholarship on the Weimar Republic. First, this study contrasts communist and what I called 'anti-authoritarian socialist' theories and practices of labor and literature, as well as the relation these groups on the Weimar left perceived between working and writing. All too often, communism and anti-authoritarian socialism are treated as existing in separate worlds when they really are estranged siblings with significant differences *and* similarities. Most studies of Weimar working class literature and culture are either single-author studies, or select a broader sample of sources based on the political affiliation of the contributors. As a result, one finds many well-researched, but highly compartmentalized, accounts of social-democratic, communist, or anarchist discourse and culture. By discussing communist and anti-authoritarian socialist sources in one single study, I have tried to avoid such a compartmentalization.

Second, I have based this study on a multitude of previously neglected texts – a hidden archive of sources that can tell us much about the complicated responses to industrial modernity during the Weimar years. Rather than focusing on the better-known works of more or less canonical authors usually associated with either communism or anarcho-syndicalism (e.g. Karl Grünberg, Willi Bredel, Berta Lask, Franz Jung, Erich Mühsam, Theodor Plivier, etc.), I discussed texts that were published mostly by no-name authors, often under pseudonyms, in the culture sections of the communist and anti-

authoritarian socialist press throughout the 1920s. This approach, which is predicated on a broad, non-canonical understanding of literature and the assumption that such "low" articulations may reveal more about popular dispositions toward work than the "great works" of imaginative literature, I would like to place this study in the tradition of cultural studies (understood not as a field, but a methodology or set of guiding principles). Especially the Birmingham School, with its focus on "lowbrow" and "popular" culture and the everyday, has informed my approach. In this theoretical tradition, culture is viewed as "ordinary," and attention is drawn to the historical conditions of the separation of 'art' and 'culture' from other social realms. I view having introduced my readers to these rather unknown texts as a major part of my contribution to the field.

Third, this study set out to take seriously what, with Joseph Vogl, I called *Wissenszusammenhang*: the epistemological continuum between (or shared knowledge of) economic and literary texts and practices. Predicated, again, on the cultural materialism of the Birmingham School, I sought to analyze writing about labor in the context of labor history and theory, and to historicize them both. Seeing Romanticism as the decisive watershed, Raymond Williams writes:

> What were seen at the end of the nineteenth century as disparate interests, between which a man must choose and in the act of choice declare himself poet or sociologist, were, normally, at the beginning of the century, seen as interlocking interests: a conclusion about society, and an observation of natural beauty carried a necessary moral reference to the whole and unified life of man. The subsequent dissociation of interests certainly prevents us from seeing the full significance of

> this remarkable period, but we must ad also that the dissociation is itself in part a product of the nature or the Romantic attempt. (Williams, 1995, p. 30)

But rather than accepting this process of "dissociation of interests" as a natural corollary of modernity (as systems theory does through the concept of 'differentiation'), British cultural studies challenges us to uncover the hidden connections within the social arena. Williams has formulated this project explicitly as a challenge to orthodox Marxism and pointed to

> a general inadequacy, among Marxists, in the use of 'culture' as a term. It normally indicates, in their writings, the intellectual and imaginative products of a society; this corresponds with the weak use of 'superstructure.' But it would seem that from their emphasis on the interdependence of all elements of social reality, and from their analytic emphasis on movement and change, Marxists should logically use 'culture' in the sense of a whole way of life, a general social process. (Williams, 1995, p. 282)

This inclusive understanding of culture was the main underlying premise of my own study as well. My main criticism of the existing scholarship on the literature and culture of the Weimar left (the bulk of which came into existence roughly between 1968 and 1982), was precisely that it treated its object of study within the narrow confines of literary history. We might say that this was a necessary first step: worker authors and their preferred discursive modalities and strategies had to be introduced into the literary canon where their "artistic value," however, remained marginal. But this (re)discovery of proletarian literature and culture operated within a still rather narrow understanding of culture as "imaginative arts," no matter how hard authors like Peter Bürger (1974) tried to change that. It is not enough to recognize and celebrate "engaged" art(ists) and see

how they intervened in all aspects of social life. Instead, it takes truly inter-disciplinary research which is able to comprehend not just how the arts address, say, economic issues, but how the very practice of art is interdependent with changes in the economic sphere. Borrowing a phrase from Fredric Jameson a propos his evaluation of modernism, one must "dig its tunnel from both directions; one must, in other words, not only deduce modernism from modernization, but also scan the sedimented traces of modernization within the aesthetic work itself." (Jameson 2002, p. 304)

Finally, this study accounted for the trans-national dimensions of the Weimar left's theories and practices of literature and labor. While the Weimar Republic is commonly (and rightly) portrayed in the force field of Americanism and Bolshevism, I also considered the important role Mexico played as an outlet for the discontent with modernity. The combination of these four aspects is what I see as a unique contribution to the scholarship.

The result of this investigation is a complex picture: the title's question – all work and no play? – cannot be answered in a straight-forward fashion. Rather, the Weimar left appeared as torn between conflicting impulses: between work and play; embrace and rejection of industrial modernity; between infatuation with, and hatred for, the conveyor belt; Ford and Marx; between the Marx of *Capital* and the Marx of *The German Ideology* or the late writings about the Russian peasant commune; between the supposedly hyper-industrial Soviet Union and an (again supposedly) pre-industrial Mexico; between industrial reportage, the realist novel, and (once again supposedly) pre-industrial

storytelling, and so on. As I stated several times, these tensions, contradictions, or maybe even aporias run through Marx, Marxism and the left from the beginning. As we have seen, they also cut across the divide between communism and anti-authoritarian socialism and appear in most texts on either side.

My own position in outlining these tensions within Marxism and the Weimar left has not been disinterested. Rather, I have approached the material from a perspective within Marxism critical of work-based and wage-based society. Therefore, this study drew heavily on the tradition of 'autonomist Marxism' (Cleaver, Virno) as well as on current debates on the European left about the future of work (Gorz, Beck). This perspective, which has become fully available only after the end of the Cold War and its false dichotomies, is critical of the endless imposition of labor in both capitalist and socialist societies and attempts to rethink the Marxist tradition from the vantage point of a 'second modernity' (Beck). The critique of work-based and wage-based society, I should add, is not some post-industrial fantasy or chimera, but a burning necessity when we consider the global division(s) of labor, the labor markets in the "post-industrial" countries, ecological questions, etc.

Frequently, the study of the 'working class', as I have come to know it at conferences and in publications, harbors within itself a certain conservatism. This conservatism, I would argue, stems from an exclusionary logic that is foundational to the field: the exclusion of those who do not perform waged work (from the unemployed and the *lumpenproletariat* to many women and illegal immigrants). Studying the undoubtedly

heroic labor struggles of (predominantly male and industrial) waged workers often amounts in fact to an affirmation of the wage form itself. From such a perspective, unemployment, low wages, bad working conditions, and social inequality simply are temporary problems that can be overcome through collective action (unionization, strikes, socialism, etc.), while the wage form itself comes to be seen as quite "natural." The challenge to waged work posed by those who do not readily fit (or do not want to fit) this paradigm all too often falls by the wayside.

Critiquing such a homogenous notion of 'the working class' (in the singular) based on the fundamental exclusion of large groups of subalterns, theorists have more recently begun to search for alternative terms that would avoid such a conceptual – and very practical – exclusion. Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, and Paolo Virno, to name just the best-known examples, have proposed the concept of the 'multitude' as a way out of this impasse:

> In its most narrow usage the concept [the working class] is employed to refer only to industrial workers, separating them from workers in agriculture, services, and other sectors; at its most broad, working class refers to all waged workers, separating them from the poor, unpaid domestic laborers, and all others who do not receive a wage. The multitude, in contrast, is an open, inclusive concept. (Hardt/Negri 2004, xiv)

Hardt, Negri, and Virno suggest this conceptual change largely due to the dramatic changes in the post-Fordist world in which the industrial working class no longer occupies a central position. The concept, however, can (and, I hope, did) prove fruitful also in studying historical periods that are marked by a still large segment of industrial

workers, such as the Weimar Republic; even there, the concept of *one* working class seems to affirm distinctions rather than dispel them – Karl-Heinz Roth's important notion of *andere Arbeiterbewegung* (the other workers' movement) already went in that direction in the 1970s. Challenging such a monolithic conception allows us a critical vantage point from which the status of – and disposition toward – work among different groups of a struggling multitude can be assessed.

In using Marx's writings about the Russian peasant commune as a relay between the two parts of this study, I have arrived at a rather critical position on Weimar (and Soviet) communism and at a more favorable view of its anti-authoritarian counterpart. Especially in Chapter Three, I suggested that – despite often overly Romantic ruminations – anti-authoritarian socialist positions on work (and non-work) are of greater relevance for us today than communist ones. In the middle of dramatic transformations of forms of work (the shift to what is sometimes, and problematically, called 'immaterial labor', while the industrial work force still keeps growing world-wide), the "refusal to work" is more pressing than ever. By "refusal to work" I do not mean inactivity, but a search for alternatives to waged labor. This kind of exodus, of course, remains as much a utopian position in the globalized economy of the twenty-first century as during the 1920s.

Illustrations

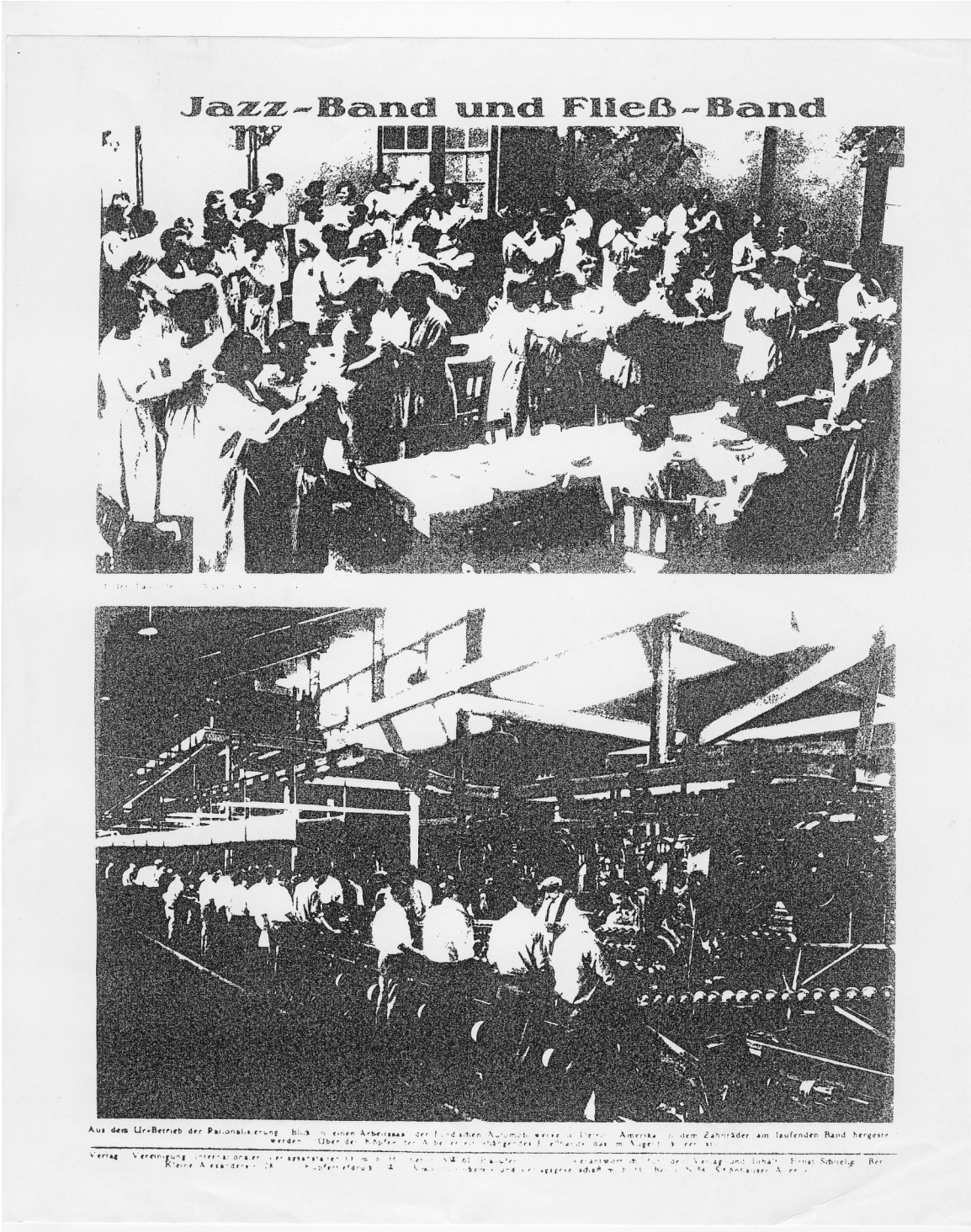

Figure 1: Jazz-Band und Fließ-Band

In der Sowjetunion herrscht der Arbeiter

Er organisiert die sozialistische Produktion und ihre Verteidigung

Das Kownoer Blutgericht

Horthy-Gericht

Proteskundgebungen an der litauischen Grenze

Die Verhaftungen in Polen

Prager Kommunistenprozeß

Figure 2: In der Sowjetunion herrscht der Arbeiter

Figure 3: Grüße aus Sowjetrußland

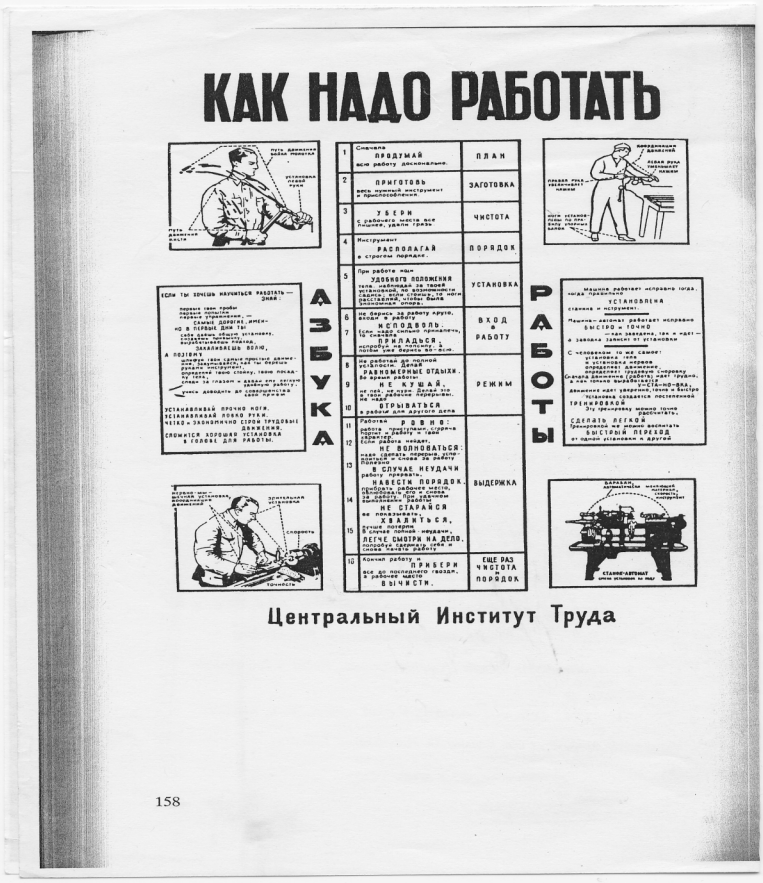

Figure 4: Kak nado rabotat

Figure 5: krieg dem kriege! keinerlei produktion für den massenmord!

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